THE ENCHANTED ISLAND
SHERWOOD
TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN
NEW POEMS

L. L. MILLER
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COLLECTED POEMS

VOLUME II.

COLLECTED POEMS

BY

ALFRED NOYES

VOLUME TWO

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COLLECTED POEMS

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

AND OTHER POEMS

MIST IN THE VALLEY

I

Mist in the valley, weeping mist
  Beset my homeward way.
No gleam of rose or amethyst
  Hallowed the parting day;
A shroud, a shroud of awful grey
  Wrapped every woodland brow,
And drooped in crumbling disarray
  Around each wintry bough.

II

And closer round me now it clung
  Until I scarce could see
The stealthy pathway overhung
  By silent tree and tree
Which floated in that mystery
  As—poised in waveless deeps—
Branching in worlds below the sea,
  The grey sea-forest sleeps.

III

Mist in the valley, mist no less
  Within my groping mind!
The stile swam out: a wilderness
  Rolled round it, grey and blind.

A yard in front, a yard behind,
So strait my world was grown,
I stooped to win once more some kind
Glimmer of twig or stone.

IV

I crossed and lost the friendly stile
And listened. Never a sound
Came to me. Mile on mile on mile
It seemed the world around
Beneath some infinite sea lay drowned
With all that e'er drew breath;
Whilst I, alone, had strangely found
A moment's life in death.

V

A universe of lifeless grey
Oppressed me overhead.
Below, a yard of clinging clay
With rotting foliage red
Glimmered. The stillness of the dead,
Hark!—was it broken now
By the slow drip of tears that bled
From hidden heart or bough.

VI

Mist in the valley, mist no less
That muffled every cry
Across the soul's grey wilderness
Where faith lay down to die;
Buried beyond all hope was I,
Hope had no meaning there:
A yard above my head the sky
Could only mock at prayer.

VII

E'en as I groped along, the gloom
  Suddenly shook at my feet!
O, strangely as from a rending tomb
  In resurrection, sweet
Swift wings tumultuously beat
  Away! I paused to hark—
O, birds of thought, too fair, too fleet
  To follow across the dark!

VIII

Yet, like a madman's dream, there came
  One fair swift flash to me
Of distances, of streets a-flame
  With joy and agony,
And further yet, a moon-lit sea
  Foaming across its bars,
And further yet, the infinity
  Of wheeling suns and stars,

IX

And further yet . . . O, mist of suns
  I grope amidst your light,
O, further yet, what vast response
  From what transcendent height?
Wild wings that burst thro' death's dim night
  I can but pause and hark;
For O, ye are too swift, too white,
  To follow across the dark!

X

Mist in the valley, yet I saw,
  And in my soul I knew
The gleaming City whence I draw
  The strength that then I drew,
My misty pathway to pursue
  With steady pulse and breath
Through these dim forest-ways of dew
  And darkness, life and death.

A SONG OF THE PLOUGH

I

(Morning.)

IDLE, comfortless, bare,
The broad bleak acres lie:
The ploughman guides the sharp ploughshare
Steadily nigh.

The big plough-horses lift
And climb from the marge of the sea,
And the clouds of their breath on the clear wind drift
Over the fallow lea.

Streaming up with the yoke,
Brown as the sweet-smelling loam,
Thro' a sun-swept smother of sweat and smoke
The two great horses come.

Up thro' the raw cold morn
They trample and drag and swing;
And my dreams are waving with ungrown corn
In a far-off spring.

It is my soul lies bare
Between the hills and the sea:
Come, ploughman Life, with thy sharp ploughshare,
And plough the field for me.

II

(Evening.)

Over the darkening plain
As the stars regain the sky,
Steals the chime of an unseen rein
Steadily nigh.

Lost in the deepening red
The sea has forgotten the shore:
The great dark steeds with their muffled tread
Draw near once more.

To the furrow's end they sweep
Like a sombre wave of the sea,
Lifting its crest to challenge the deep
Hush of Eternity.

Still for a moment they stand,
Massed on the sun's red death,
A surge of bronze, too great, too grand,
To endure for more than a breath.

Only the billow and stream
Of muscle and flank and mane
Like darkling mountain-cataracts gleam
Gripped in a Titan's rein.

Once more from the furrow's end
They wheel to the fallow lea,
And down the muffled slope descend
To the sleeping sea.

And the fibrous knots of clay,
And the sun-dried clots of earth
Cleave, and the sunset cloaks the grey
Waste and the stony dearth!

O, broad and dusky and sweet,
The sunset covers the weald;
But my dreams are waving with golden wheat
In a still strange field.

My soul, my soul lies bare,
Between the hills and the sea;
Come, ploughman Death, with thy sharp ploughshare,
And plough the field for me.

THE BANNER

WHO in the gorgeous vanguard of the years
With wingèd helmet glistens, let him hold
Ere he pluck down this banner, crying "It bears
An old device"; for, though it seem the old,

It is the new! No rent shroud of the past,
But its transfigured spirit that still shines
Triumphantly before the foremost lines,
Even from the first prophesying the last.

And whoso dreams to pluck it down shall stand
Bewildered, while the great host thunders by;
And he shall show the rent shroud in his hand
And "Lo, I lead the van!" he still shall cry;

While leagues away, the spirit-banner shines
Rushing in triumph before the foremost lines.

RANK AND FILE

I

DRUM-TAPS! Drum-taps! Who is it marching,
Marching past in the night? Ah, hark,
Draw your curtains aside and see
Endless ranks of the stars o'er-arching
Endless ranks of an army marching,
Marching out of the measureless dark,
Marching away to Eternity.

II

See the gleam of the white sad faces
Moving steadily, row on row,
Marching away to their hopeless wars:
Drum-taps, drum-taps, where are they marching?
Terrible, beautiful, human faces,
Common as dirt, but softer than snow,
Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars.

III

Is it the last rank readily, steadily
  Swinging away to the unknown doom?
    Ere you can think it, the drum-taps beat
Louder, and here they come marching, marching,
Great new level locked ranks of them readily
  Steadily swinging out of the gloom
    Marching endlessly down the street.

IV

Unregarded imperial regiments
  White from the roaring intricate places
    Deep in the maw of the world's machine,
Well content, they are marching, marching,
Unregarded imperial regiments,
  Ay, and there are those terrible faces
    Great world-heroes that might have been.

V

Hints and facets of One—the Eternal,
  Faces of grief, compassion and pain,
    Faces of hunger, faces of stone,
Faces of love and of labour, marching,
Changing facets of One—the Eternal,
  Streaming up thro' the wind and the rain,
    All together and each alone.

VI

You that doubt of the world's one Passion,
  You for whose science the stars are a-stray,
    Hark—to their orderly thunder-tread!
These, in the night, with the stars are marching
One to the end of the world's one Passion!
  You that have taken their Master away,
    Where have you laid Him, living or dead?

VII

You whose laws have hidden the One Law,
You whose searchings obscure the goal,
You whose systems from chaos begun,
Chance-born, order-less, hark, they are marching,
Hearts and tides and stars to the One Law,
Measured and orderly, rhythmical, whole,
Multitudinous, welded and one.

VIII

Split your threads of the seamless purple,
Round you marches the world-wide host,
Round your skies is the marching sky,
Out in the night there's an army marching,
Clothed with the night's own seamless purple,
Making death for the King their boast,
Marching straight to Eternity.

IX

What do you know of the shot-riddled banners
Royally surging out of the gloom,
You whose denials their souls despise?
Out in the night they are marching, marching!
Treasure your wisdom, and leave them their banners!
Then—when you follow them down to the tomb
Pray for one glimpse of the faith in their eyes.

X

Pray for one gleam of the white sad faces,
Moving steadily, row on row,
Marching away to their hopeless wars,
Doomed to be trodden like dung, but marching,
Terrible, beautiful human faces,
Common as dirt, but softer than snow,
Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars.

XI

What of the end? Will your knowledge escape it?
What of the end of their dumb dark tears?
You who mock at their faith and sing,
Look, for their ragged old banners are marching
Down to the end—will your knowledge escape it?—
Down to the end of a few brief years!
What should they care for the wisdom you bring.

XII

Count as they pass, their hundreds, thousands,
Millions, marching away to a doom
Younger than London, older that Tyre!
Drum-taps, drum-taps, where are they marching,
Regiments, nations, empires, marching?
Down thro' the jaws of a world-wide tomb,
Doomed or ever they sprang from the mire!

XIII

Doomed to be shovelled like dung to the midden,
Trodden and kneaded as clay in the road,
Father and little one, lover and friend,
Out in the night they are marching, marching,
Doomed to be shovelled like dung to the midden,
Bodies that bowed beneath Christ's own load,
Love that—marched to the self-same end.

XIV

What of the end?—O, not of your glory,
Not of your wealth or your fame that will live
Half as long as this pellet of dust!—
Out in the night there's an army marching,
Nameless, noteless, empty of glory,
Ready to suffer and die and forgive,
Marching onward in simple trust,

XV

Wearing their poor little toy love-tokens
Under the march of the terrible skies!
Is it a jest for a God to play?—
Whose is the jest of these millions marching,
Wearing their poor little toy love-tokens,
Waving their voicelessly grand good-byes,
Secretly trying, sometimes, to pray.

XVI

Dare you dream their trust in Eternity
Broken, O you to whom prayers are vain,
You who dream that their God is dead?
Take your answer—these millions marching
Out of Eternity, into Eternity,
These that smiled "We shall meet again,"
Even as the life from their loved one fled.

XVII

This is the answer, not of the sages,
Not of the loves that are ready to part,
Ready to find their oblivion sweet!
Out in the night there's an army marching,
Men that have toiled thro' the endless ages,
Men of the pit and the desk and the mart,
Men that remember, the men in the street,

XVIII

These that into the gloom of Eternity
Stream thro' the dream of this lamp-starred town
London, an army of clouds to-night!
These that of old came marching, marching,
Out of the terrible gloom of Eternity,
Bowing their heads at Rameses' frown.
Streaming away thro' Babylon's light;

XIX

These that swept at the sound of the trumpet
Out thro' the night like gonfaloned clouds,
Exiled hosts when the world was Rome,
Tossing their tattered old eagles, marching
Down to sleep till the great last trumpet,
London, Nineveh, rend your shrouds,
Rally the legions and lead them home,

XX

Lead them home with their glorious faces
Moving steadily, row on row
Marching up from the end of wars,
Out of the Valley of Shadows, marching,
Terrible, beautiful, human faces,
Common as dirt, but softer than snow,
Coarser than clay, but calm as the stars,

XXI

Marching out of the endless ages,
Marching out of the dawn of time,
Endless columns of unknown men,
Endless ranks of the stars o'er-arching
Endless ranks of an army marching
Numberless out of the numberless ages,
Men out of every race and clime,
Marching steadily, now as then.

THE SKY-LARK CAGED

I

Beat, little breast, against the wires.
Strive, little wings and misted eyes
Which one wild gleam of memory fires
Beseeching still the unfettered skies,
Whither at dewy dawn you sprang
Quivering with joy from this dark earth and sang.

II

And still you sing—your narrow cage
  Shall set at least your music free!
Its rapturous wings in glorious rage
  Mount and are lost in liberty,
While those who caged you creep on earth
Blind prisoners from the hour that gave them birth.

III

Sing! The great City surges round.
  Blinded with light, thou canst not know.
Dream! 'Tis the fir-woods' windy sound
  Rolling a psalm of praise below.
Sing, o'er the bitter dust and shame,
And touch us with thine own transcendent flame.

IV

Sing, o'er the City dust and slime;
  Sing, o'er the squalor and the gold,
The greed that darkens earth with crime,
  The spirits that are bought and sold.
O, shower the healing notes like rain,
And lift us to the height of grief again.

V

Sing! The same music swells your breast,
  And the wild notes are still as sweet
As when above the fragrant nest
  And the wide billowing fields of wheat
You soared and sang the livelong day,
And in the light of heaven dissolved away.

VI

The light of heaven! Is it not here?
  One rapture, one ecstatic joy,
One passion, one sublime despair,
  One grief which nothing can destroy,
You—though your dying eyes are wet
Remember, 'tis our blunted hearts forget.

VII

Beat, little breast, still beat, still beat,
  Strive, misted eyes and tremulous wings;
Swell, little throat, your *Sweet! Sweet! Sweet!*
  Thro' which such deathless memory rings:
Better to break your heart and die,
Than, like your gaolers, to forget your sky.

THE LOVERS' FLIGHT

I

Come, the dusk is lit with flowers!
  Quietly take this guiding hand:
Little breath to waste is ours
  On the road to lovers' land.
Time is in his dungeon-keep!
  Ah, not thither, lest he hear,
Starting from his old grey sleep,
  Rosy feet upon the stair.

II

Ah, not thither, lest he heed
  Ere we reach the rusty door!
Nay, the stairways only lead
  Back to his dark world once more:
There's a merrier way we know
  Leading to a lovelier night—
See, your casement all a-glow
  Diamonding the wonder-light.

III

Fling the flowery lattice wide,
  Let the silken ladder down,
Swiftly to the garden glide
  Glimmering in your long white gown,

Rosy from your pillow, sweet,
  Come, unsandalled and divine;
Let the blossoms stain your feet
  And the stars behold them shine.

IV

Swift, our pawing palfreys wait,
  And the page—Dan Cupid—frets,
Holding at the garden gate
  Reins that chime like castanets,
Bits a-foam with fairy flakes
  Flung from seas whence Venus rose:
Come, for Father Time awakes
  And the star of morning glows.

V

Swift—one satin foot shall sway
  Half a heart-beat in my hand,
Swing to stirrup and swift away
  Down the road to lovers' land:
Ride—the moon is dusky gold,
  Ride—our hearts are young and warm,
Ride—the hour is growing old,
  And the next may break the charm.

VI

Swift, ere we that thought the song
  Full—for others—of the truth,
We that smiled, contented, strong,
  Dowered with endless wealth of youth,
Find that like a summer cloud
  Youth indeed has crept away,
Find the robe a clinging shroud
  And the hair be-sprent with grey.

VII

Ride—we'll leave it all behind,
  All the turmoil and the tears,
All the mad vindictive blind
  Yelping of the heartless years!
Ride—the ringing world's in chase,
  Yet we've slipped old Father Time,
By the love-light in your face
  And the jingle of this rhyme.

VIII

Ride—for still the hunt is loud!
  Ride—our steeds can hold their own!
Yours, a satin sea-wave, proud,
  Queen, to be your living throne,
Glittering with the foam and fire
  Churned from seas whence Venus rose,
Tow'rds the gates of our desire
  Gloriously burning flows.

IX

He, with streaming flanks a-smoke,
  Needs no spur of blood-stained steel:
Only that soft thudding stroke
  Once, o' the little satin heel,
Drives his mighty heart, your slave,
  Bridled with these bells of rhyme,
Onward, like a crested wave
  Thundering out of hail of Time.

X

On, till from a rosy spark
  Fairy-small as gleams your hand,
Broadening as we cleave the dark,
  Dawn the gates of lovers' land,

Nearing, sweet, till breast and brow
  Lifted through the purple night
Catch the deepening glory now
  And your eyes the wonder-light.

XI

E'en as tow'rd your face I lean
  Swooping nigh the gates of bliss,
I the king and you the queen
  Crown each other with a kiss.
Riding, soaring like a song
  Burn we tow'rds the heaven above,
You the sweet and I the strong
  And in both the fire of love.

XII

Ride—though now the distant chase
  Knows that we have slipped old Time,
Lift the love-light of your face,
  Shake the bridle of this rhyme,
See, the flowers of night and day
  Streaming past on either hand,
Ride into the eternal May,
  Ride into the lovers' land.

THE ROCK POOL

I

Bright as a fallen fragment of the sky,
  Mid shell-encrusted rocks the sea-pool shone,
Glassing the sunset-clouds in its clear heart,
A small enchanted world enwalled apart
    In diamond mystery,
Content with its own dreams, its own strict zone
  Of urchin woods, its fairy bights and bars,
  Its daisy-disked anemones and rose-feathered stars.

II

Forsaken for awhile by that deep roar
  Which works in storm and calm the eternal will,
Drags down the cliffs, bids the great hills go by
And shepherds their multitudinous pageantry,—
    Here, on this ebb-tide shore
A jewelled bath of beauty, sparkling still,
  The little sea-pool smiled away the sea,
And slept on its own plane of bright tranquillity.

III

A self-sufficing soul, a pool in trance,
  Un-stirred by all the spirit-winds that blow
From o'er the gulfs of change, content, ere yet
On its own crags, which rough peaked limpets fret
    The last rich colours glance,
Content to mirror the sea-bird's wings of snow,
  Or feel in some small creek, ere sunset fails,
  A tiny Nautilus hoist its lovely purple sails;

IV

And, furrowing into pearl that rosy bar,
  Sail its own soul from fairy fringe to fringe,
Lured by the twinkling prey 'twas born to reach
In its own pool, by many an elfin beach
    Of jewels, adventuring far
Through the last mirrored cloud and sunset-tinge
  And past the rainbow-dripping cave where lies
  The dark green pirate-crab at watch with beaded eyes,

V

Or fringed Medusa floats like light in light,
Medusa, with the loveliest of all fays
Pent in its irised bubble of jellied sheen,
Trailing long ferns of moonlight, shot with green
And crimson rays and white,
Waving ethereal tendrils, ghostly sprays,
Daring the deep, dissolving in the sun,
The vanishing point of life, the light whence life
begun.

VI

Poised between me, light, time, eternity,
So tinged with all, that in its delicate brain
Kindling it as a lamp with her bright wings
Day-long, night-long, young Ariel sits and sings
Echoing the lucid sea,
Listening it echo her own unearthly strain,
Watching through lucid walls the world's rich tide.
One light, one substance with her own, rise and
subside.

VII

And over soft brown woods, limpid, serene,
Puffing its fans the Nautilus went its way,
And from a hundred salt and weedy shelves
Peered little hornèd faces of sea-elves:
The prawn darted, half-seen,
Thro' watery sunlight, like a pale green ray,
And all around, from soft green waving bowers,
Creatures like fruit out-crept from fluted shells like
flowers.

VIII

And, over all, that glowing mirror spread
The splendour of its heaven-reflecting gleams,
A level wealth of tints, calm as the sky
That broods above our own mortality:
The temporal seas had fled,
And ah, what hopes, what fears, what mystic dreams
Could ruffle it now from any deeper deep?
Content in its own bounds it slept a changeless sleep.

IX

Suddenly, from that heaven beyond belief,
Suddenly, from that world beyond its ken,
Dashing great billows o'er its rosy bars,
Shivering its dreams into a thousand stars,
Flooding each sun-dried reef
With waves of colour, (as once, for mortal men
Bethesda's angel) with blue eyes, wide and wild,
Naked into the pool there stepped a little child.

X

Her red-gold hair against the far green sea
Blew thickly out: her slender golden form
Shone dark against the richly waning West
As with one hand she splashed her glistening breast,
Then waded up to her knee
And frothed the whole pool into a fairy storm! . . .
So, stooping through our skies, of old, there came
Angels that once could set this world's dark pool
a-flame,

XI

From which the seas of faith have ebbed away,
  Leaving the lonely shore too bright, too bare,
While mirrored softly in the smooth wet sand
A deeper sunset sees its blooms expand
    But all too phantom-fair,
Between the dark brown rocks and sparkling spray
  Where the low ripples pleaded, shrank and sighed,
And tossed a moment's rainbow heavenward ere they
    died.

XII

Stoop, starry souls, incline to this dark coast,
  Where all too long, too faithlessly, we dream.
Stoop to the world's dark pool, its crags and scars,
Its yellow sands, its rosy harbour-bars,
    And soft green wastes that gleam
But with some glorious drifting god-like ghost
Of cloud, some vaguely passionate crimson stain:
Rend the blue waves of heaven, shatter our sleep
    again!

THE ISLAND HAWK

(A SONG FOR THE FIRST LAUNCHING OF HIS MAJESTY'S AERIAL NAVY)

I

Chorus—

Ships have swept with my conquering name
  Over the waves of war,
Swept thro' the Spaniards' thunder and flame
  To the splendour of Trafalgar:
On the blistered decks of their great renown,

In the wind of my storm-beat wings,
Hawkins and Hawke went sailing down
To the harbour of deep-sea kings!
By the storm-beat wings of the hawk, the hawk,
Beni beak and pitiless breast,
They clove their way thro' the red sea-fray:
Who wakens me now to the quest?

II

Hushed are the whimpering winds on the hill,
Dumb is the shrinking plain,
And the songs that enchanted the woods are still
As I shoot to the skies again!
Does the blood grow black on my fierce bent beak,
Does the down still cling to my claw?
Who brightened these eyes for the prey they seek?
Life, I follow thy law!
For I am the hawk, the hawk, the hawk!
Who knoweth my pitiless breast?
Who watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way?
Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

III

As I glide and glide with my peering head,
Or swerve at a puff of smoke,
Who watcheth my wings on the wind outspread,
Here—gone—with an instant stroke?
Who toucheth the glory of life I feel
As I buffet this great glad gale,
Spire and spire to the cloud-world, wheel,
Loosen my wings and sail?
For I am the hawk, the island hawk,
Who knoweth my pitiless breast?
Who watcheth me sway in the sun's bright way?
Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

IV

Had they given me "Cloud-cuckoo-city" to guard
  Between mankind and the sky,
Tho' the dew might shine on an April sward,
  Iris had ne'er passed by!
Swift as her beautiful wings might be
  From the rosy Olympian hill,
Had Epops entrusted the gates to me
Earth were his kingdom still.
  For I am the hawk, the archer, the hawk!
    Who knoweth my pitiless breast?
  Who watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way?
    Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

V

My mate in the nest on the high bright tree
  Blazing with dawn and dew,
She knoweth the gleam of the world and the glee
  As I drop like a bolt from the blue;
She knoweth the fire of the level flight
  As I skim, close, close to the ground,
With the long grass lashing my breast and the bright
  Dew-drops flashing around.
  She watcheth the hawk, the hawk, the hawk,
    (O, the red-blotched eggs in the nest!)
  Watcheth him sway in the sun's bright way;
    Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

VI

She builded her nest on the high bright wold,
  She was taught in a world afar,
The lore that is only an April old
  Yet old as the evening star;

Life of a far off ancient day
In an hour unhooded her eyes;
In the time of the budding of one green spray
She was wise as the stars are wise.
Brown flower of the tree of the hawk, the hawk,
On the old elm's burgeoning breast,
She watcheth me sway in the wild wind's way;
Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

VII

Spirit and sap of the sweet swift Spring,
Fire of our island soul,
Burn in her breast and pulse in her wing
While the endless ages roll;
Avatar—she—of the perilous pride
That plundered the golden West,
Her glance is a sword, but it sweeps too wide
For a rumour to trouble her rest.
She goeth her glorious way, the hawk,
She nurseth her brood alone;
She will not swoop for an owlet's whoop,
She hath calls and cries of her own.

VIII

There was never a dale in our isle so deep
That her wide wings were not free
To soar to the sovran heights and keep
Sight of the rolling sea:
Is it there, is it here in the rolling skies,
The realm of her future fame?
Look once, look once in her glittering eyes,
Ye shall find her the same, the same.
Up to the skies with the hawk, the hawk,
As it was in the days of old!
Ye shall sail once more, ye shall soar, ye shall soar
To the new-found realms of gold.

IX

She hath ridden on white Arabian steeds
  Thro' the ringing English dells,
For the joy of a great queen, hunting in state,
  To the music of golden bells;
A queen's fair fingers have drawn the hood
  And tossed her aloft in the blue,
A white hand eager for needless blood;
  I hunt for the needs of two.
Yet I am the hawk, the hawk, the hawk!
  Who knoweth my pitiless breast?
Who watcheth me sway in the sun's bright way?
  Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

X

Who fashioned her wide and splendid eyes
  That have stared in the eyes of kings?
With a silken twist she was looped to their wrist:
  She has clawed at their jewelled rings!
Who flung her first thro' the crimson dawn
  To pluck him a prey from the skies,
When the love-light shone upon lake and lawn
  In the valleys of Paradise?
Who fashioned the hawk, the hawk, the hawk,
  Bent beak and pitiless breast?
Who watcheth him sway in the wild wind's way?
  Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

XI

Is there ever a song in all the world
  Shall say how the quest began
With the beak and the wings that have made us kings
  And cruel—almost—as man?

The wild wind whimpers across the heath
  Where the sad little tufts of blue
And the red-stained grey little feathers of death
  Flutter! *Who fashioned us? Who?*
    Who fashioned the scimitar wings of the hawk,
      Bent beak and arrowy breast?
    Who watcheth him sway in the sun's bright way?
      Flee—flee—for I quest, I quest.

XII

Linnet and woodpecker, red-cap and jay,
  Shriek that a doom shall fall
One day, one day, on my pitiless way
  From the sky that is over us all;
But the great blue hawk of the heavens above
  Fashioned the world for his prey,—
King and queen and hawk and dove,
  We shall meet in his clutch that day;
    Shall I not welcome him, I, the hawk?
      Yea, cry, as they shrink from his claw,
    Cry, as I die, to the unknown sky,
      Life, I follow thy law!

XIII

Chorus—
  Ships have swept with my conquering name . . . .
    Over the world and beyond,
  Hark! Bellerophon, Marlborough, Thunderer,
    Condor, respond!—
  On the blistered decks of their dread renown,
    In the rush of my storm-beat wings,
  Hawkins and Hawke went sailing down
    To the glory of deep-sea kings!
      By the storm-beat wings of the hawk, the hawk,
        Bent beak and pitiless breast,
      They clove their way thro' the red sea-fray!
        Who wakens me now to the quest.

THE ADMIRAL'S GHOST

I TELL you a tale to-night
  Which a seaman told to me,
With eyes that gleamed in the lanthorn light
  And a voice as low as the sea.

You could almost hear the stars
  Twinkling up in the sky,
And the old wind woke and moaned in the spars,
  And the same old waves went by,

Singing the same old song
  As ages and ages ago,
While he froze my blood in that deep-sea night
  With the things that he seemed to know.

A bare foot pattered on deck;
  Ropes creaked; then—all grew still,
And he pointed his finger straight in my face
  And growled, as a sea-dog will.

"Do' ee know who Nelson was?
  That pore little shrivelled form
With the patch on his eye and the pinned-up sleeve
  And a soul like a North Sea storm?

"Ask of the Devonshire men!
  They know, and they'll tell you true;
He wasn't the pore little chawed-up chap
  That Hardy thought he knew.

"He wasn't the man you think!
  His patch was a dern disguise!
For he knew that they'd find him out, d'you see,
  If they looked him in both his eyes.

"He was twice as big as he seemed;
  But his clothes were cunningly made.
He'd both of his hairy arms all right!
  The sleeve was a trick of the trade.

"You've heard of sperrits, no doubt;
Well, there's more in the matter than that!
But he wasn't the patch and he wasn't the sleeve,
And he wasn't the laced cocked-hat.

"*Nelson was just—a Ghost!*
You may laugh! But the Devonshire men
They knew that he'd come when England called,
And they know that he'll come again.

"I'll tell you the way it was
(For none of the landsmen know),
And to tell it you right, you must go a-starn
Two hundred years or so.

. . . . . .

"The waves were lapping and slapping
The same as they are to-day;
And Drake lay dying aboard his ship
In Nombre Dios Bay.

"The scent of the foreign flowers
Came floating all around;
'But I'd give my soul for the smell o' the pitch,'
Says he, 'in Plymouth Sound.

" 'What shall I do,' he says,
'When the guns begin to roar,
An' England wants me, and me not there
To shatter 'er foes once more?'

"(You've heard what he said, maybe,
But I'll mark you the p'ints again;
For I want you to box your compass right
And get my story plain.)

" 'You must take my drum,' he says,
'To the old sea-wall at home;
And if ever you strike that drum,' he says,
'Why, strike me blind, I'll come!

"'If England needs me, dead
Or living, I'll rise that day!
I'll rise from the darkness under the sea
Ten thousand miles away.'

"That's what he said; and he died;
An' his pirates, listenin' roun',
With their crimson doublets and jewelled swords
That flashed as the sun went down,

"They sewed him up in his shroud
With a round-shot top and toe,
To sink him under the salt sharp sea
Where all good seamen go.

"They lowered him down in the deep,
And there in the sunset light
They boomed a broadside over his grave,
As meanin' to say 'Good-night.'

"They sailed away in the dark
To the dear little isle they knew;
And they hung his drum by the old sea-wall
The same as he told them to.

. . . . . .

"Two hundred years went by,
And the guns began to roar,
And England was fighting hard for her life,
As ever she fought of yore.

"'It's only my dead that count,'
She said, as she says to-day;
'It isn't the ships and it isn't the guns
'Ull sweep Trafalgar's Bay.'

"D'you guess who Nelson was?
You may laugh, but it's true as true!
There was more in that pore little chawed-up chap
Than ever his best friend knew.

"The foe was creepin' close,
  In the dark, to our white-cliffed isle;
They were ready to leap at England's throat,
  When—O, you may smile, you may smile;

"But—ask of the Devonshire men;
  For they heard in the dead of night
The roll of a drum, and they saw *him* pass
  On a ship all shining white.

"He stretched out his dead cold face
  And he sailed in the grand old way!
The fishes had taken an eye and his arm,
  But he swept Trafalgar's Bay.

"Nelson—was Francis Drake!
  O, what matters the uniform,
Or the patch on your eye or your pinned-up sleeve,
  If your soul's like a North Sea storm?"

EDINBURGH

I

City of mist and rain and blown grey spaces,
  Dashed with wild wet colour and gleam of tears,
Dreaming in Holyrood halls of the passionate faces
  Lifted to one Queen's face that has conquered the years,
Are not the halls of thy memory haunted places?
  Cometh there not as a moon (where the blood-rust sears
Floors a-flutter of old with silks and laces),
  Gliding, a ghostly Queen, thro' a mist of tears?

II

Proudly here, with a loftier pinnacled splendour,
  Throned in his northern Athens, what spells remain
Still on the marble lips of the Wizard, and render
  Silent the gazer on glory without a stain!

Here and here, do we whisper, with hearts more tender,
  Tusitala wandered thro' mist and rain;
Rainbow-eyed and frail and gallant and slender,
  Dreaming of pirate-isles in a jewelled main.

III

Up the Canongate climbeth, cleft asunder
  Raggedly here, with a glimpse of the distant sea
Flashed through a crumbling alley, a glimpse of wonder,
  Nay, for the City is throned on Eternity!
Hark! from the soaring castle a cannon's thunder
  Closeth an hour for the world and an æon for me,
Gazing at last from the martial heights whereunder
  Deathless memories roll to an ageless sea.

IN A RAILWAY CARRIAGE

Three long isles of sunset-cloud,
  Poised in an ocean of gold,
Floated away in the west
  As the long train southward rolled;

And through the gleam and shade of the panes,
  While meadow and wood went by,
Across the streaming earth
  We watched the steadfast sky.

Dark before the westward window,
  Heavy and bloated, rolled
The face of a drunken woman
  Nodding against the gold;

Dark before the infinite glory,
  With bleared and leering eyes,
It stupidly lurched and nodded
  Against the tender skies.

What had ye done to her, masters of men,
That her head be bowed down thus—
Thus for your golden vespers,
And deepening angelus?

Dark, besotted, malignant, vacant,
Slobbering, wrinkled, old,
Weary and wickedly smiling,
She nodded against the gold.

Pitiful, loathsome, maudlin, lonely,
Her moist, inhuman eyes
Blinked at the flies on the window,
And could not see the skies.

As a beast that turns and returns to a mirror
And will not see its face,
Her eyes rejected the sunset,
Her soul lay dead in its place,

Dead in the furrows and folds of her flesh
As a corpse lies lapped in the shroud;
Silently floated beside her
The isles of sunset-cloud.

What had ye done to her, years upon years,
That her head should be bowed down thus—
Thus for your golden vespers,
And deepening angelus?

Her nails were blackened and split with labour,
Her back was heavily bowed;
Silently floated beside her
The isles of sunset-cloud.

Over their tapering streaks of lilac,
In breathless depths afar,
Bright as the tear of an angel
Glittered a lonely star.

While the hills and the streams of the world went past us,
And the long train roared and rolled
Southward, and dusk was falling,
She nodded against the gold.

AN EAST-END COFFEE-STALL

Down the dark alley a ring of orange light
Glows. God, what leprous tatters of distress,
Droppings of misery, rags of Thy loneliness
Quiver and heave like vermin, out of the night!

Like crippled rats, creeping out of the gloom,
O Life, for one of thy terrible moments there,
Lit by the little flickering yellow flare,
Faces that mock at life and death and doom,

Faces that long, long since have known the worst,
Faces of women that have seen the child
Waste in their arms, and strangely, terribly, smiled
When the dark nipple of death has eased its thirst;

Faces of men that once, though long ago,
Saw the faint light of hope, though far away,—
Hope that, at end of some tremendous day,
They yet might reach some life where tears could flow;

Faces of our humanity, ravaged, white,
Wrenched with old love, old hate, older despair,
Steal out of vile filth-dropping dens to stare
On that wild monstrance of a naphtha light.

They crowd before the stall's bright altar rail,
Grotesque, and sacred, for that light's brief span,
And all the shuddering darkness cries, "All hail,
Daughters and Sons of Man!"

See, see, once more, though all their souls be dead,
  They hold it up, triumphantly hold it up,
  They feel, they warm their hands upon the Cup;
Their crapulous hands, their claw-like hands break Bread!

See, with lean faces rapturously a-glow
  For a brief while they dream and munch and drink;
  Then, one by one, once more, silently slink
Back, back into the gulfing mist. They go,

One by one, out of the ring of light!
  They creep, like crippled rats, into the gloom,
  Into the fogs of life and death and doom,
Into the night, the immeasurable night.

RED OF THE DAWN

I

The Dawn peered in with blood-shot eyes
  Pressed close against the cracked old pane.
  The garret slept: the slow sad rain
Had ceased: grey fogs obscured the skies;
But Dawn peered in with haggard eyes.

II

All as last night? The three-legged chair,
  The bare walls and the tattered bed,
  All!—but for those wild flakes of red
(And Dawn, perhaps, had splashed them there!)
Round the bare walls, the bed, the chair.

III

'Twas here, last night, when winds were loud,
  A ragged singing-girl, she came
  Out of the tavern's glare and shame,
With some few pence—for she was proud—
Came home to sleep, when winds were loud.

IV

And she sleeps well; for she was tired!
That huddled shape beneath the sheet
With knees up-drawn, no wind or sleet
Can wake her now! Sleep she desired;
And she sleeps well, for she was tired.

V

And there was one that followed her
With some unhappy curse called "love":
Last night, though winds beat loud above,
She shrank! Hark, on the creaking stair,
What stealthy footstep followed her?

VI

But now the Curse, it seemed, had gone!
The small tin-box, wherein she hid
Old childish treasures, had burst its lid.
Dawn kissed her doll's cracked face. It shone
Red-smeared, but laughing—*the Curse is gone.*

VII

So she sleeps well: she does not move;
And on the wall, the chair, the bed,
Is it the Dawn that splashes red,
High as the text where *God is Love*
Hangs o'er her head? She does not move.

VIII

The clock dictates its old refrain:
All else is quiet; or, far away,
Shaking the world with new-born day,
There thunders past some mighty train:
The clock dictates its old refrain.

IX

The Dawn peers in with blood-shot eyes:
  The crust, the broken cup are there!
  She does not rise yet to prepare
Her scanty meal. God does not rise
  And pluck the blood-stained sheet from her;
But Dawn peers in with haggard eyes.

THE DREAM-CHILD'S INVITATION

I

Once upon a time!—Ah, now the light is burning dimly.
  Peterkin is here again: he wants another tale!
Don't you hear him whispering—*The wind is in the chimley,*
  The ottoman's a treasure-ship, we'll all set sail?

II

All set sail? No, the wind is very loud to-night:
  The darkness on the waters is much deeper than of yore.
Yet I wonder—hark, he whispers—if the little streets are still
      as bright
  In old Japan, in old Japan, that happy haunted shore.

III

I wonder—hush, he whispers—if perhaps the world will wake
      again
  When Christmas brings the stories back from where the
      skies are blue,
Where clouds are scattering diamonds down on every cottage
      window-pane,
  And every boy's a fairy prince, and every tale is true.

IV

There the sword Excalibur is thrust into the dragon's throat,
  Evil there is evil, black is black, and white is white:
There the child triumphant hurls the villain spluttering into
    the moat;
  There the captured princess only waits the peerless knight.

V

Fairyland is gleaming there beyond the Sherwood Forest
    trees,
  There the City of the Clouds has anchored on the plain
All her misty vistas and slumber-rosy palaces
  (*Shall we not, ah, shall we not, wander there again?*)

VI

"Happy ever after" there, the lights of home a welcome fling
  Softly thro' the darkness as the star that shone of old,
Softly over Bethlehem and o'er the little cradled King
  Whom the sages worshipped with their frankincense and
    gold.

VII

Once upon a time—perhaps a hundred thousand years ago—
  Whisper to me, Peterkin, I have forgotten when!
Once upon a time there was a way, a way we used to know
  For stealing off at twilight from the weary ways of men.

VIII

Whisper it, O whisper it—the way, the way is all I need!
  All the heart and will are here and all the deep desire!
Once upon a time—ah, now the light is drawing near indeed,
  I see the fairy faces flush to roses round the fire.

IX

Once upon a time—the little lips are on my cheek again,
Little fairy fingers clasped and clinging draw me nigh,
Dreams, no more than dreams, but they unloose the weary
prisoner's chain
And lead him from his dungeon! "What's a thousand
years?" they cry.

X

A thousand years, a thousand years, a little drifting dream ago,
All of us were hunting with a band of merry men,
The skies were blue, the boughs were green, the clouds were
crisping isles of snow . . .
. . . So Robin blew his bugle, and the Now became the
Then.

THE TRAMP TRANSFIGURED

(AN EPISODE IN THE LIFE OF A CORN-FLOWER MILLIONAIRE)

I

ALL the way to Fairyland across the thyme and heather,
Round a little bank of fern that rustled on the sky,
Me and stick and bundle, sir, we jogged along together,—
(Changeable the weather? Well—it ain't all pie!)
Just about the sunset—Won't you listen to my story?—
Look at me! I'm only rags and tatters to your eye!
Sir, that blooming sunset crowned this battered hat with glory!
Me that was a crawling worm became a butterfly—
(Ain't it hot and dry?
Thank you, sir, thank you, sir!) a blooming butterfly.

II

Well, it happened this way! I was lying loose and lazy,
Just as, of a Sunday, you yourself might think no shame,
Puffing little clouds of smoke, and picking at a daisy,
Dreaming of your dinner, p'raps, or wishful for the same:

Suddenly, around that ferny bank there slowly waddled—
  Slowly as the finger of a clock her shadow came—
Slowly as a tortoise down that winding path she toddled,
  Leaning on a crookèd staff, a poor old crookèd dame,
    Limping, but not lame,
  Tick, tack, tick, tack, a poor old crookèd dame.

III

Slowly did I say, sir? Well, you've heard that funny fable
  Consekint the tortoise and the race it give an 'are?
This was curiouser than that! At first I wasn't able
  Quite to size the memory up that bristled thro' my hair:
Suddenly, I'd got it, with a nasty shivery feeling,
  While she walked and walked and yet was not a bit more
    near,—
Sir, it was the tread-mill earth beneath her feet a-wheeling
  Faster than her feet could trot to heaven or anywhere,
    Earth's revolvin' stair
  Wheeling, while my wayside clump was kind of anchored
    there.

IV

Tick, tack, tick, tack, and just a little nearer,
  Inch and 'arf an inch she went, but never gained a yard:
Quiet as a fox I lay; I didn't wish to scare 'er,
  Watching thro' the ferns, and thinking "What a rum old
    card!"
Both her wrinkled tortoise eyes with yellow resin oozing,
  Both her poor old bony hands were red and seamed and
    scarred!
Lord, I felt as if myself was in a public boozing,
  While my own old woman went about and scrubbed and
    charred!
    Lord, it seemed so hard!
  Tick, tack, tick, tack, she never gained a yard.

V

Yus, and there in front of her—I hadn't seen it rightly—
Lurked that little finger-post to point another road,
Just a tiny path of poppies twisting infi-nite-ly
Through the whispering seas of wheat, a scarlet thread that showed
White with ox-eye daisies here and there and chalky cobbles,
Blue with waving corn-flowers: far and far away it glowed,
Winding into heaven, I thinks; but, Lord, the way she hobbles,
Lord, she'll never reach it, for she bears too great a load;
Yus, and then I knowed,
If she did, she couldn't, for the board was marked *No Road*.

VI

Tick, *tack*, *tick*, *tack*, I couldn't wait no longer!
Up I gets and bows polite and pleasant as a toff—
"Arternoon," I says, "I'm glad your boots are going stronger;
Only thing I'm dreading is your feet 'ull both come off."
Tick, *tack*, *tick*, *tack*, she didn't stop to answer,
"Arternoon," she says, and sort o' chokes a little cough,
"I must get to Piddinghoe to-morrow if I can, sir!"
"Demme, my good woman! Haw! Don't think I mean to loff,"
Says I, like a toff,
"Where d'you mean to sleep to-night? God made this grass for go'ff."

VII

Tick, *tack*, *tick*, *tack*, and smilingly she eyed me
(Dreadful the low cunning of these creechars, don't you think?)
"That's all right! The weather's bright. Them bushes there 'ull hide me.
Don't the gorse smell nice?" I felt my derned old eyelids blink!

"Supper? I've a crust of bread, a big one, and a bottle,"
(Just as I expected! Ah, these creechars always drink!)
"Sugar and water and half a pinch of tea to rinse my throttle,
Then I'll curl up cosy!"—"If you're cotched it means the clink!"
—"Yus, but don't you think
If a star should see me, God 'ull tell that star to wink?"

VIII

"Now, look here," I says, "I don't know what your blooming age is!"
"Three-score years and five," she says, "that's five more years to go
Tick, tack, tick tack, before I gets my wages!"
"Wages all be damned," I says, "there's one thing that I know—
Gals that stay out late o' nights are sure to meet wi' sorrow.
Speaking as a toff," I says, "it isn't *comme il faut!*
Tell me why you want to get to Piddinghoe to-morrow."—
"That was where my son worked, twenty years ago!"—
"Twenty years ago?
Never wrote? May still be there? Remember you?
. . . Just so!"

IX

Yus, it was a drama; but she weren't my long-lost parent!
Tick, tack, tick, tack, she trotted all the while,
Never getting forrarder, and not the least aware on't,
Though I stood beside her with a sort of silly smile
Stock-still! *Tick, tack!* This blooming world's a bubble:
There I stood and stared at it, mile on flowery mile,
Chasing o' the sunset.—"Gals are sure to meet wi' trouble
Staying out o' nights," I says, once more, and tries to smile,
"Come, that ain't your style,
Here's a shilling, mother, for to-day I've made my pile!"

X

Yus, a dozen coppers, all my capital, it fled, sir,
Representin' twelve bokays that cost me nothink each,
Twelve bokays o' corn-flowers blue that grew beside my bed, sir,
That same day, at sunrise, when the sky was like a peach:
Easy as a poet's dreams they blossomed round my head, sir,
All I had to do was just to lift my hand and reach:
So, upon the roaring waves I cast my blooming bread, sir,
Bread I'd earned with nose-gays on the bare-foot Brighton beach,
Nose-gays *and* a speech,
All about the bright blue eyes they matched on Brighton beach.

XI

Still, you've only got to hear the bankers on the budget,
Then you'll know the giving game is hardly "high finance";
Which no more it wasn't for that poor old dame to trudge it,
Tick, tack, tick, tack, on such a devil's dance:
Crumbs, it took me quite aback to see her stop so humble,
Casting up into my face a sort of shiny glance,
Bless you, bless you, that was what I thought I heard her mumble;
Lord, a prayer for poor old Bill, a rummy sort of chance!
Crumbs, that shiny glance
Kinder made me king of all the sky from here to France.

XII

Tick, tack, tick, tack, but now she toddled faster:
Soon she'd reach the little twisted by-way through the wheat.
"Look 'ee here," I says, "young woman, don't you court disaster!
Peepin' through yon poppies there's a cottage trim and neat

White as chalk and sweet as turf: wot price a bed for sorrow,
  Sprigs of lavender between the pillow and the sheet?"
"No," she says, "I've got to get to Piddinghoe to-morrow!
  P'raps they'd tell the work'us! And I've lashings here to
      eat:
        Don't the gorse smell sweet?" . . .
  Well, I turned and left her plodding on beside the wheat.

XIII

Every cent I'd given her like a hero in a story;
  Yet, alone with leagues of wheat I seemed to grow aware
Solomon himself, arrayed in all his golden glory,
  Couldn't vie with Me, the corn-flower king, the millionaire!
How to cash those bright blue cheques that night? My
      trouser pockets
  Jingled sudden! Six more pennies, crept from James knew
      where!
Crumbs! I hurried back with eyes just bulging from their
      sockets,
    Pushed 'em in the old dame's fist and listened for the prayer,
      Shamming not to care,
    Bill—the blarsted chicken-thief, the corn-flower millionaire.

XIV

Tick, *tack*, *tick*, *tack*, and faster yet she clattered!
  Ay, she'd almost gained a yard! I left her once again.
Feeling very warm inside and sort of 'ighly flattered.
  On I plodded, all alone, with hay-stacks in my brain.
Suddenly, with *chink—chink—chink*, the old sweet jingle
    Startled me! 'TWAS THRUPPENCE MORE! Three coppers
      round and plain!
Lord, temptation struck me and I felt my gullet tingle.
  Then—I hurried back, beside them seas of golden grain:
      No, I can't explain;
    There I thrust 'em in her fist, and left her once again.

XV

Tinkle-chink! THREE HA'PENCE! If the vulgar fractions followed,
Big fleas have little fleas! It flashed upon me there,—
Like the snakes of Pharaoh which the snakes of Moses swallowed
All the world was playing at the tortoise and the hare:
Half the smallest atom is—my soul was getting tipsy—
Heaven is one big circle and the centre's everywhere,
Yus, and that old woman was an angel and a gipsy,
Yus, and Bill, the chicken-thief, the corn-flower millionaire,
Shamming not to care,
What was he? A seraph on the misty rainbow-stair!

XVI

Don't you make no doubt of it! The deeper that you look, sir,
All your ancient poets tell you just the same as me,—
What about old Ovid and his most indecent book, sir,
Morphosizing females into flower and star and tree?
What about old Proteus and his 'ighly curious 'abits,
Mixing of his old grey beard into the old grey sea?
What about old Darwin and the hat that brought forth rabbits,
Mud and slime that growed into the pomp of Ninevey?
What if there should be
One great Power beneath it all, one God in you and me?

XVII

Anyway, it seemed to me I'd struck the world's pump-handle!
"Back with that three ha'pence, Bill," I mutters, "or you're lost."
Back I hurries thro' the dusk where, shining like a candle,
Pale before the sunset stood that fairy finger-post.
Sir, she wasn't there! I'd struck the place where all roads crost,
All the roads in all the world.

She couldn't yet have trotted
Even to the . . . Hist! a stealthy step behind? A ghost?
Swish! A flying noose had caught me round the neck! Garotted!
Back I staggered, clutching at the moonbeams, yus, almost
Throttled! Sir, I boast
Bill is tough, but . . . when it comes to throttling by a ghost!

. . . . . .

XVIII

Winged like a butterfly, tall and slender
Out It steps with the rope on its arm.
"Crumbs," I says, "all right! I surrender!
When have I crossed you or done you harm?
Ef you're a sperrit," I says, "O, crikey,
Ef you're a sperrit, get hence, vamoose!"
Sweet as music, she spoke—"I'm Psyche!"—
Choking me still with her silken noose.

XIX

Straight at the word from the ferns and blossoms
Fretting the moon-rise over the downs,
Little blue wings and little white bosoms,
Little white faces with golden crowns
Peeped, and the colours came twinkling round me,
Laughed, and the turf grew purple with thyme,
Danced, and the sweet crushed scents nigh drowned me,
Sang, and the hare-bells rang in chime.

XX

All around me, gliding and gleaming,
Fair as a fallen sunset-sky,
Butterfly wings came drifting, dreaming,
Clouds of the little folk clustered nigh,
Little white hands like pearls uplifted
Cords of silk in shimmering skeins,
Cast them about me and dreamily drifted
Winding me round with their soft warm chains.

XXI

Round and round me they dizzily floated,
  Binding me faster with every turn:
Crumbs, my pals would have grinned and gloated
  Watching me over that fringe of fern,
Bill, with his battered old hat outstanding
  Black as a foam-swept rock to the moon,
Bill, like a rainbow of silks expanding
  Into a beautiful big cocoon,—

XXII

Big as a cloud, though his hat still crowned him,
  Yus, and his old boots bulged below:
Seas of colour went shimmering round him,
  Dancing, glimmering, glancing a-glow!
Bill knew well what them elves were at, sir,—
  Ain't you an en-to-mol-o-gist?
Well, despite of his old black hat, sir,
  Bill was *becoming—a chrysalist.*

. . . . . .

XXIII

Muffled, smothered in a sea of emerald and opal,
  Down a dazzling gulf of dreams I sank and sank away,
Wound about with twenty thousand yards of silken rope, all
  Shimmering into crimson, glimmering into grey,
Drowsing, waking, living, dying, just as you regards it,
  Buried in a sunset-cloud, or cloud of breaking day,
'Cording as from East or West yourself might look towards it,
  Losing, gaining, lost in darkness, ragged, grimy, gay,
    'And-cuffed, not to say
  Gagged, but both my shoulders budding, sprouting white as
    May.

XXIV

Sprouting like the milky buds o' hawthorn in the night-time,
  Pouting like the snowy buds o' roses in July,
Spreading in my chrysalist and waiting for the right time,
  When—I thought—they'd bust to wings and Bill would rise
    and fly,

Tick, tack, tick, tack, as if it came in answer,
Sweeping o'er my head again the tide o' dreams went by,—
I must get to Piddinghoe to-morrow if I can, sir,
Tick, tack, a crackle in my chrysalist, a cry!
Then the warm blue sky
Bust the shell, and out crept Bill—a blooming butterfly!

. . . . . .

XXV

Blue as a corn-flower, blazed the zenith: the deepening East
like a scarlet poppy
Burned while, dazzled with golden bloom, white clouds like
daisies, green seas like wheat,
Gripping the sign-post, first, I climbs, to sun my wings, which
were wrinkled and floppy,
Spreading 'em white o'er the words *No Road*, and hanging
fast by my six black feet.

XXVI

Still on my head was the battered old beaver, but through it
my clubbed antennæ slanted,
("Feelers" yourself would probably call 'em) my battered
old boots were hardly seen
Under the golden fluff of the tail! It was Bill, sir, Bill, though
highly enchanted,
Spreading his beautiful snow-white pinions, tipped with
orange, and veined with green.

XXVII

Yus, old Bill was an Orange-tip, a spirit in glory, a blooming
Psyche!
Now, it was new from East to West this rummy old world
that I dreamed I knew,
How can I tell you the things that I saw with my—what shall
I call 'em?—"feelers?"—O, crikey,
"Feelers?" You know how the man born blind described
such colours as scarlet or blue.

XXVIII

"Scarlet," he says, "is the sound of a trumpet, blue is a flute,"
for he hasn't a notion!
No, nor nobody living on earth can tell it him plain, if he
hasn't the sight!
That's how it stands with ragged old Bill, a-drift and a-dream
on a measureless ocean,
Gifted wi' fifteen new-born senses, and seeing you blind to
their new strange light.

XXIX

How can I tell you? Sir, you must wait, till you die like Bill,
ere you understand it!
Only—I saw—the same as a bee that strikes to his hive ten
leagues away—
Straight as a die, while I winked and blinked on that sun-
warmed wood and my wings expanded
(Whistler drawings that men call wings)—I saw—and I flew
—that's all I can say.

XXX

Flew over leagues of whispering wonder, fairy forests and
flowery palaces,
Love-lorn casements, delicate kingdoms, beautiful flaming
thoughts of—Him;
Feasts of a million blue-mailed angels lifting their honey-and-
wine-brimmed chalices,
Throned upon clouds—(which you'd call white clover) down
to the world's most rosiest rim.

XXXI

New and new and new and new, the white o' the cliffs and the
wind in the heather,
Yus, and the sea-gulls flying like flakes of the sea that flashed
to the new-born day,
Song, song, song, song, quivering up in the wild blue weather,
Thousands of seraphim singing together, and me just flying
and—*knowing my way*.

XXXII

Straight as a die to Piddinghoe's dolphin, and there I drops
in a cottage garden,
There, on a sun-warmed window-sill, I winks and peeps, for
the window was wide!
Crumbs, he was there and fast in her arms and a-begging his
poor old mother's pardon,
There with his lips on her old grey hair, and her head on
his breast while she laughed and cried,—

XXXIII

*"One and nine-pence that old tramp gave me, or else I should
never have reached you, sonny,
Never, and you just leaving the village to-day and meaning to
cross the sea,
One and nine-pence he gave me, I paid for the farmer's lift with
half o' the money!
Here's the ten-pence halfpenny, sonny, 'twill pay for our little
'ouse-warming tea."*

. . . . . .

XXXIV

Tick, tack, tick, tack, out into the garden
Toddles that old Fairy with his arm about her—so,
Cuddling of her still, and still a-begging of her pardon,
While she says "I wish the corn-flower king could only
know!
Bless him, bless him, once again," she says and softly gazes
Up to heaven, a-smiling in her mutch as white as snow,
All among her gilly-flowers and stocks and double daisies,
Mignonette, forget-me-not, . . . *Twenty years ago,*
All a rosy glow,
This is how it was, she said, *Twenty years ago.*

. . . . . .

XXXV

Once again I seemed to wake, the vision it had fled, sir,
  There I lay upon the downs: the sky was like a peach;
Yus, with twelve bokays of corn-flowers blue beside my bed,
      sir,
  More than usual 'andsome, so they'd bring me two-pence
      each.
Easy as a poet's dreams they blossomed round my head, sir,
  All I had to do was just to lift my hand and reach,
Tie 'em with a bit of string, and earn my blooming bread,
      sir,
  Selling little nose-gays on the bare-foot Brighton beach,
      Nose-gays *and* a speech,
  All about the bright blue eyes they matched on Brighton
      beach.

XXXVI

Overhead the singing lark and underfoot the heather,
  Far and blue in front of us the unplumbed sky,
Me and stick and bundle, O, we jogs along together,
  (Changeable the weather? Well, it ain't all pie!)
Weather's like a woman, sir, and if she wants to quarrel,
  If her eyes begin to flash and hair begins to fly,
You've to wait a little, then—the story has a moral—
  Ain't the sunny kisses all the sweeter by and bye?—
      (Crumbs, it's 'ot and dry!
  Thank you, sir! Thank you, sir!) the sweeter by and bye.

XXXVII

So the world's my sweetheart and I sort of want to squeeze 'er.
  Toffs 'ull get no chance of heaven, take 'em in the lump!
Never laid in hay-fields when the dawn came over-sea, sir?
  Guess it's true that story 'bout the needle and the hump!

Never crept into a stack because the wind was blowing,
  Hollered out a nest and closed the door-way with a clump,
Laid and heard the whisper of the silence, growing, growing,
  Watched a thousand wheeling stars and wondered if they'd
    bump?
      What I say would stump
  Joshua! But I've done it, sir. Don't think I'm off my
    chump.

XXXVIII

If you try and lay, sir, with your face turned up to wonder,
  Up to twenty million miles of stars that roll like one,
Right across to God knows where, and you just huddled under
  Like a little beetle with no business of his own,
There you'd hear—like growing grass—a funny silent sound,
    sir,
  Mixed with curious crackles in a steady undertone,
Just the sound of twenty billion stars a-going round, sir,
  Yus, and you beneath 'em like a wise old ant, alone,
      Ant upon a stone,
Waving of his antlers, on the Sussex downs, alone.

ON THE DOWNS

Wide-eyed our childhood roamed the world
  Knee-deep in blowing grass,
And watched the white clouds crisply curled
  Above the mountain-pass,
And lay among the purple thyme
  And from its fragrance caught
Strange hints from some elusive clime
  Beyond the bounds of thought.

Glimpses of fair forgotten things
  Beyond the gates of birth,
Half-caught from far off ancient springs
  In heaven, and half of earth;

And coloured like a fairy-tale
  And whispering evermore
Half memories from the half-fenced pale
  Of lives we lived before.

Here, weary of the roaring town
  A-while may I return
And while the west wind roams the down
  Lie still, lie still and learn:
Here are green leagues of murmuring wheat
  With blue skies overhead,
And, all around, the winds are sweet
  With May-bloom, white and red.

And, to and fro, the bee still hums
  His low unchanging song,
And the same rustling whisper comes
  As through the ages long:
Through all the thousands of the years
  That same sweet rumour flows,
With dreaming skies and gleaming tears
  And kisses and the rose.

Once more the children throng the lanes,
  Themselves like flowers, to weave
Their garlands and their daisy-chains
  And listen and believe
The tale of *Once-upon-a-time,*
  And hear the *Long-ago*
And *Happy-ever-after* chime
  Because it must be so.

And by those thousands of the years
  It is, though scarce we see,
Dazed with the rainbows of our tears,
  Their steadfast unity,
It is, or life's disjointed schemes,
  These stones, these ferns unfurled
With such deep care—a madman's dreams
  Were wisdom to this world!

Dust into dust! Lie still and learn,
Hear how the ages sing
The solemn joy of our return
To that which makes the Spring:
Even as we came, with childhood's trust,
Wide-eyed we go, to Thee
Who holdest in Thy sacred dust
The heavenly Springs to be.

A MAY-DAY CAROL

WHAT is the loveliest light that Spring
Rosily parting her robe of grey
Girdled with leaflet green, can fling
Over the fields where her white feet stray?
What is the merriest promise of May
Flung o'er the dew-drenched April flowers?
Tell me, you on the pear-tree spray—
Carol of birds between the showers.

What can life at its lightest bring
Better than this on its brightest day?
How should we fetter the white-throat's wing
Wild with joy of its woodland way?
Sweet, should love for an hour delay,
Swift, while the primrose-time is ours!
What is the lover's royallest lay?—
Carol of birds between the showers.

What is the murmur of bees a-swing?
What is the laugh of a child at play?
What is the song that the angels sing?
(Where were the tune could the sweet notes stay
Longer than this, to kiss and betray?)
Nay, on the blue sky's topmost towers,
What is the song of the seraphim? Say—
Carol of birds between the showers.

Thread the stars on a silver string,
(So did they sing in Bethlehem's bowers!)
Mirth for a little one, grief for a king,
Carol of birds between the showers.

THE CALL OF THE SPRING

Come, choose your road and away, my lad,
Come, choose your road and away!
We'll out of the town by the road's bright crown
As it dips to the dazzling day.
It's a long white road for the weary;
But it rolls through the heart of the May.

Though many a road would merrily ring
To the tramp of your marching feet,
All roads are one from the day that's done,
And the miles are swift and sweet,
And the graves of your friends are the mile-stones
To the land where all roads meet.

But the call that you hear this day, my lad,
Is the Spring's old bugle of mirth
When the year's green fire in a soul's desire
Is brought like a rose to the birth;
And knights ride out to adventure
As the flowers break out of the earth.

Over the sweet-smelling mountain-passes
The clouds lie brightly curled;
The wild-flowers cling to the crags and swing
With cataract-dews impearled;
And the way, the way that you choose this day
Is the way to the end of the world.

It rolls from the golden long ago
To the land that we ne'er shall find;
And it's uphill here, but it's downhill there,
For the road is wise and kind,
And all rough places and cheerless faces
Will soon be left behind.

Come, choose your road and away, away,
We'll follow the gipsy sun;
For it's soon, too soon to the end of the day,
And the day is well begun;
And the road rolls on through the heart of the May,
And there's never a May but one.

There's a fir-wood here, and a dog-rose there,
And a note of the mating dove;
And a glimpse, maybe, of the warm blue sea,
And the warm white clouds above;
And warm to your breast in a tenderer nest
Your sweetheart's little glove.

There's not much better to win, my lad,
There's not much better to win!
You have lived, you have loved, you have fought, you have proved
The worth of folly and sin;
So now come out of the City's rout,
Come out of the dust and the din.

Come out,—a bundle and stick is all
You'll need to carry along,
If your heart can carry a kindly word,
And your lips can carry a song;
You may leave the lave to the keep o' the grave,
If your lips can carry a song!

Come, choose your road and away, my lad,
Come, choose your road and away!
We'll out of the town by the road's bright crown,
As it dips to the sapphire day!
All roads may meet at the world's end,
But, hey for the heart of the May!
Come, choose your road and away, dear lad,
Come choose your road and away.

A DEVONSHIRE DITTY

I

In a leafy lane of Devon
  There's a cottage that I know,
    Then a garden—then, a grey old crumbling wall,
And the wall's the wall of heaven
  (Where I hardly care to go)
    And there isn't any fiery sword at all.

II

But I never went to heaven.
  There was right good reason why,
    For they sent a shining angel to me there
An angel, down in Devon,
  (Clad in muslin by the bye)
    With the halo of the sunshine on her hair.

III

Ah, whate'er the darkness covers,
  And whate'er we sing or say,
    Would you climb the wall of heaven an hour too soon
If you knew a place for lovers
  Where the apple-blossoms stray
    Out of heaven to sway and whisper to the moon?

IV

When we die—we'll think of Devon
  Where the garden's all aglow
    With the flowers that stray across the grey old wall:
Then we'll climb it, out of heaven,
  From the other side, you know,
Straggle over it from heaven
  With the apple-blossom snow,
Tumble back again to Devon
  Laugh and love as long ago,
Where there isn't any fiery sword at all.

BACCHUS AND THE PIRATES

Half a hundred terrible pig-tails, pirates famous in song and
story,
Hoisting the old black flag once more, in a palmy harbour of
Caribbee,
"Farewell" we waved to our brown-skinned lasses, and chorus-
sing out to the billows of glory,
Billows a-glitter with rum and gold, we followed the sunset
over the sea.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred broad-sheet pirates
When the world was young!

Sea-roads plated with pieces of eight that rolled to a heaven
by rum made mellow,
Heaved and coloured our barque's black nose where the
Lascar sang to a twinkling star,
And the tangled bow-sprit plunged and dipped its point in
the west's wild red and yellow,
Till the curved white moon crept out astern like a naked
knife from a blue cymar.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred terrible pirates
When the world was young!

Half a hundred tarry pig-tails, Teach, the chewer of glass, had
taught us,
Taught us to balance the plank ye walk, your little plank-
bridge to Kingdom Come:
Half a score had sailed with Flint, and a dozen or so the devil
had brought us
Back from the pit where Blackbeard lay, in Beelzebub's
bosom, a-screech for rum.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred piping pirates
When the world was young!

There was Captain Hook (of whom ye have heard—so called
from his terrible cold steel twister,
His own right hand having gone to a shark with a taste for
skippers on pirate-trips),
There was Silver himself, with his cruel crutch, and the blind
man Pew, with a phiz like a blister,
Gouged and white and dreadfully dried in the reek of a
thousand burning ships.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred cut-throat pirates
When the world was young!

With our silver buckles and French cocked hats and our
skirted coats (they were growing greener,
But green and gold look well when spliced! We'd trimmed
'em up wi' some fine fresh lace)
Bravely over the seas we danced to the horn-pipe tune of a
concertina,
Cutlasses jetting beneath our skirts and cambric handker-
chiefs all in place.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred elegant pirates
When the world was young!

And our black prow grated, one golden noon, on the happiest
isle of the Happy Islands,
An isle of Paradise, fair as a gem, on the sparkling breast
of the wine-dark deep,
An isle of blossom and yellow sand, and enchanted vines on
the purple highlands,
Wi' grapes like melons, nay clustering suns, a-sprawl over
cliffs in their noonday sleep.

While earth goes round let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred dream-struck pirates
When the world was young!

And lo! on the soft warm edge of the sand, where the sea like wine in a golden noggin
Creamed, and the rainbow-bubbles clung to his flame-red hair, a white youth lay,
Sleeping; and now, as his drowsy grip relaxed, the cup that he squeezed his grog in
Slipped from his hand and its purple dregs were mixed with the flames and flakes of spray.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred diffident pirates
When the world was young!

And we suddenly saw (had we seen them before? They were coloured like sand or the pelt on his shoulders)
His head was pillowed on two great leopards, whose breathing rose and sank with his own;
Now a pirate is bold, but the vision was rum and would *call* for rum in the best of beholders,
And it seemed we had seen Him before, in a dream, with that flame-red hair and that vine-leaf crown.

And the earth went round, and the rum went round,
And softlier now we sung:
Half a hundred awe-struck pirates
When the world was young!

Now Timothy Hook (of whom ye have heard, with his talon of steel) our doughty skipper,
A man that, in youth being brought up pious, had many a book on his cabin-shelf,
Suddenly caught at a comrade's hand with the tearing claws of his cold steel flipper
And cried, "Great Thunder and Brimstone, boys, I've hit it at last! *'Tis Bacchus himself.*"

And the earth went round, and the rum went round,
And never a word we sung:
Half a hundred tottering pirates
When the world was young!

He flung his French cocked hat i' the foam (though its lace was the best of his wearing apparel):
We stared at him—Bacchus! The sea reeled round like a wine-vat splashing with purple dreams,
And the sunset-skies were dashed with blood of the grape as the sun like a new-staved barrel
Flooded the tumbling West with wine and spattered the clouds with crimson gleams.

And the earth went round, and our heads went round,
And never a word we sung:
Half a hundred staggering pirates
When the world was young!

Down to the ship for a fishing-net our crafty Hook sent Silver leaping;
Back he came on his pounding crutch, for all the world like a kangaroo;
And we caught the net and up to the Sleeper on hands and knees we all went creeping,
Flung it across him and staked it down! 'Twas the best of our dreams and the dream was true.

And the earth went round, and the rum went round,
And loudly now we sung:
Half a hundred jubilant pirates
When the world was young!

We had caught our god, and we got him aboard ere he woke (he was more than a little heavy);
Glittering, beautiful, flushed he lay in the lurching bows of the old black barque,
As the sunset died and the white moon dawned, and we saw on the island a star-bright bevy
Of naked Bacchanals stealing to watch through the whispering vines in the purple dark!

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our capstan song we sung:
Half a hundred innocent pirates
When the world was young!

Beautiful under the sailing moon, in the tangled net, with the leopards beside him,
Snared like a wild young red-lipped merman, wilful, petulant, flushed he lay;
While Silver and Hook in their big sea-boots and their boat-cloaks guarded and gleefully eyed him.
Thinking what Bacchus might do for a seaman, like standing him drinks, as a man might say.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
We sailed away and sung:
Half a hundred fanciful pirates
When the world was young!

All the grog that ever was heard of, gods, was it stowed in our sure possession?
O, the pictures that broached the skies and poured their colours across our dreams!
O, the thoughts that tapped the sunset, and rolled like a great torchlight procession
Down our throats in a glory of glories, a roaring splendour of golden streams!

And the earth went round, and the stars went round,
As we hauled the sheets and sung:
Half a hundred infinite pirates
When the world was young!

Beautiful, white, at the break of day, He woke and, the net in a smoke dissolving,
He rose like a flame, with his yellow-eyed pards and his flame-red hair like a windy dawn,
And the crew kept back, respectful like, till the leopards advanced with their eyes revolving,
Then up the rigging went Silver and Hook, and the rest of us followed with case-knives drawn.

While earth goes round, let rum go round,
Our cross-tree song we sung:
Half a hundred terrified pirates
When the world was young!

And "Take me home to my happy island!" he says. "Not
I," sings Hook, "by thunder;
We'll take you home to a happier isle, our palmy harbour
of Caribbee!"
"You won't!" says Bacchus, and quick as a dream the planks
of the deck just heaved asunder,
And a mighty Vine came straggling up that grew from the
depths of the wine-dark sea.

And the sea went round, and the skies went round,
As our cross-tree song we sung:
Half a hundred horrified pirates
When the world was young!

We were anchored fast as an oak on land, and the branches
clutched and the tendrils quickened,
And bound us writhing like snakes to the spars! Ay, we
hacked with our knives at the boughs in vain,
And Bacchus laughed loud on the decks below, as ever the
tough sprays tightened and thickened,
And the blazing hours went by, and we gaped with thirst
and our ribs were racked with pain

And the skies went round, and the sea swam round,
And we knew not what we sung:
Half a hundred lunatic pirates
When the world was young!

Bunch upon bunch of sunlike grapes, as we writhed and
struggled and raved and strangled,
Bunch upon bunch of gold and purple daubed its bloom
on our baked black lips.
Clustering grapes, O, bigger than pumpkins, just out of reach
they bobbed and dangled
Over the vine-entangled sails of that most dumbfounded of
pirate ships!

And the sun went round, and the moon came round,
And mocked us where we hung:
Half a hundred maniac pirates
When the world was young!

Over the waters the white moon winked its bruised old eye at our bowery prison,
When suddenly we were aware of a light such as never a moon or a ship's lamp throws,
And a shallop of pearl, like a Nautilus shell, came shimmering up as by magic arisen,
With sails of silk and a glory around it that turned the sea to a rippling rose.

And our heads went round, and the stars went round,
At the song that cruiser sung:
Half a hundred goggle-eyed pirates
When the world was young!

Half a hundred rose-white Bacchanals hauled the ropes of that rosy cruiser!
Over the seas they came and laid their little white hands on the old black barque;
And Bacchus he ups and he steps aboard: "Hi, stop!" cries Hook, "you frantic old boozer!
Belay, below there, don't you go and leave poor pirates to die in the dark!"

And the moon went round, and the stars went round,
As they all pushed off and sung:
Half a hundred ribbonless Bacchanals
When the world was young!

Over the seas they went and Bacchus he stands, with his yellow-eyed leopards beside him,
High on the poop of rose and pearl, and kisses his hand to us, pleasant as pie!
While the Bacchanals danced to their tambourines, and the vine-leaves flew, and Hook just eyed him
Once, as a man that was brought up pious, and scornfully hollers, "*Well*, you *ain't shy!*"

For all around him, vine-leaf crowned,
The wild white Bacchanals flung!
Nor it wasn't a sight for respectable pirates
When the world was young!

All around that rainbow-Nautilus rippled the bloom of a thousand roses,
Nay, but the sparkle of fairy sea-nymphs breasting a fairy-like sea of wine,
Swimming around it in murmuring thousands, with white arms tossing; till—all that *we* knows is
The light went out, and the night was dark, and the grapes had burst and their juice was—brine!

And the vines that bound our bodies round
Were plain wet ropes that clung,
Squeezing the light out o' fifty pirates
When the world was young!

Over the seas in the pomp of dawn a king's ship came with her proud flag flying.
Cloud upon cloud we watched her tower with her belts and her crowded zones of sail;
And an A.B. perched in a white crow's nest, with a brass-rimmed spy-glass quietly spying,
As we swallowed the lumps in our choking throats and uttered our last faint feeble hail!

And our heads went round as the ship went round,
And we thought how coves had swung:
All for playing at broad-sheet pirates
When the world was young!

Half a hundred trembling corsairs, all cut loose, but a trifle giddy,
We lands on their trim white decks at last and the bo'sun he whistles us good hot grog,
And we tries to confess, but there wasn't a soul from the Admiral's self to the gold-laced middy
But says, "They're delirious still, poor chaps," and the Cap'n he enters the fact in his log,

That his boat's crew found us nearly drowned
In a barrel without a bung—
Half a hundred suffering sea-cooks
When the world was young!

So we sailed by Execution Dock, where the swinging pirates
haughty and scornful
Rattled their chains, and on Margate beach we came like
a school-treat safe to land;
And one of us took to religion at once; and the rest of the crew,
tho' their hearts were mournful,
Capered about as Christy Minstrels, while Hook conducted
the big brass band.

And the sun went round, and the moon went round,
And, O, 'twas a thought that stung!
There was none to believe we were broad-sheet pirates
When the world was young!

Ah, yet (if ye stand me a noggin of rum) shall the old Blue
Dolphin echo the story!
We'll hoist the white cross-bones again in our palmy harbour
of Caribbee!
We'll wave farewell to our brown-skinned lasses and, chorussing
out to the billows of glory,
Billows a-glitter with rum and gold, we'll follow the sunset
over the sea!

While earth goes round, let rum go round!
O, sing it as we sung!
Half a hundred terrible pirates
When the world was young!

THE NEWSPAPER BOY

I

Elf of the City, a lean little hollow-eyed boy
Ragged and tattered, but lithe as a slip of the Spring,
Under the lamp-light he runs with a reckless joy
Shouting a murderer's doom or the death of a King.

Out of the darkness he leaps like a wild strange hint,
  Herald of tragedy, comedy, crime and despair,
Waving a poster that hurls you, in fierce black print
  One word *Mystery*, under the lamp's white glare.

II

Elf of the night of the City he darts with his crew
  Out of a vaporous furnace of colour that wreathes
Magical letters a-flicker from crimson to blue
  High overhead. All round him the mad world seethes.
Hansoms, like cantering beetles, with diamond eyes
  Run through the moons of it; busses in yellow and red
Hoot; and St. Paul's is a bubble afloat in the skies,
  Watching the pale moths flit and the dark death's head.

III

Painted and powdered they shimmer and rustle and stream
  Westward, the night moths, masks of the Magdalen! See,
Puck of the revels, he leaps through the sinister dream
  Waving his elfin evangel of *Mystery*,
Puck of the bubble or dome of their scoffing or trust,
  Puck of the fairy-like tower with the clock in its face,
Puck of an Empire that whirls on a pellet of dust
  Bearing his elfin device thro' the splendours of space.

IV

Mystery—is it the scribble of doom on the dark,
  Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin, again?
Mystery—is it a scrap of remembrance, a spark
  Burning still in the fog of a blind world's brain?
Elf of the gossamer tangles of shadow and light,
  Wild electrical webs and the battle that rolls
League upon perishing league thro' the ravenous night,
  Breaker on perishing breaker of human souls.

E. L. MILLER
1354 BROADWAY
DETROIT, - MICH.

V

Soaked in the colours, a flake of the flying spray
  Flung over wreckage and yeast of the murderous town,
Onward he flaunts it, innocent, vicious and gay,
  Prophet of prayers that are stifled and loves that drown,
Urchin and sprat of the City that roars like a sea
  Surging around him in hunger and splendour and shame,
Cruelty, luxury, madness, he leaps in his glee
  Out of the mazes of mist and the vistas of flame.

VI

Ragged and tattered he scurries away in the gloom:
  Over the thundering traffic a moment his cry
Mystery! *Mystery!*—reckless of death and doom
  Rings; and the great wheels roll and the world goes by.
Lost, is it lost, that hollow-eyed flash of the light?—
  Poor little face flying by with the word that saves,
Pale little mouth of the mask of the measureless night,
  Shrilling the heart of it, lost like the foam on its waves!

THE TWO WORLDS

This outer world is but the pictured scroll
  Of worlds within the soul,
A coloured chart, a blazoned missal-book
  Whereon who rightly look
May spell the splendours with their mortal eyes
  And steer to Paradise.

O, well for him that knows and early knows
  In his own soul the rose
Secretly burgeons, of this earthly flower
  The heavenly paramour:
And all these fairy dreams of green-wood fern,
  These waves that break and yearn,
Shadows and hieroglyphs, hills, clouds and seas,
  Faces and flowers and trees,
Terrestrial picture-parables, relate
  Each to its heavenly mate.

O, well for him that finds in sky and sea
This two-fold mystery,
And loses not (as painfully he spells
The fine-spun syllables)
The cadences, the burning inner gleam,
The poet's heavenly dream.

Well for the poet if this earthly chart
Be printed in his heart,
When to his world of spirit woods and seas
With eager face he flees
And treads the untrodden fields of unknown flowers
And threads the angelic bowers,
And hears that unheard nightingale whose moan
Trembles within his own,
And lovers murmuring in the leafy lanes
Of his own joys and pains.

For though he voyages further than the flight
Of earthly day and night,
Traversing to the sky's remotest ends
A world that he transcends,
Safe, he shall hear the hidden breakers roar
Against the mystic shore;
Shall roam the yellow sands where sirens bare
Their breasts and wind their hair;
Shall with their perfumed tresses blind his eyes,
And still possess the skies.

He, where the deep unearthly jungles are,
Beneath his Eastern star
Shall pass the tawny lion in his den
And cross the quaking fen.
He learnt his path (and treads it undefiled)
When, as a little child,
He bent his head with long and loving looks
O'er earthly picture-books.
His earthly love nestles against his side,
His young celestial guide.

GORSE

Between my face and the warm blue sky
The crisp white clouds go sailing by,
  And the only sound is the sound of your breathing,
The song of a bird and the sea's long sigh.

Here, on the downs, as a tale re-told
The sprays of the gorse are a-blaze with gold,
  As of old, on the sea-washed hills of my boyhood,
Breathing the same sweet scent as of old.

Under a ragged golden spray
The great sea sparkles far away,
  Beautiful, bright, as my heart remembers
Many a dazzle of waves in May.

Long ago as I watched them shine
Under the boughs of fir and pine,
  Here I watch them to-day and wonder,
Here, with my love's hand warm in mine.

The soft wings pass that we used to chase,
Dreams that I dreamed had left not a trace,
  The same, the same, with the bars of crimson
The green-veined white, with its floating grace,

The same to the least bright fleck on their wings!
And I close my eyes, and a lost bird sings,
  And a far sea sighs, and the old sweet fragrance
Wraps me round with the dear dead springs,

Wraps me round with the springs to be
When lovers that think not of you or me
  Laugh, but our eyes will be closed in darkness,
Closed to the sky and the gorse and the sea,

And the same great glory of ragged gold
Once more, once more, as a tale re-told
  Shall whisper their hearts with the same sweet fragrance
And their warm hands cling, as of old, as of old.

Dead and un-born, the same blue skies
Cover us! Love, as I read your eyes,
  Do I not know whose love enfolds us,
As we fold the past in our memories,

Past, present, future, the old and the new?
From the depths of the grave a cry breaks through
  And trembles, a sky-lark blind in the azure,
The depths of the all-enfolding blue.

O, resurrection of folded years
Deep in our hearts, with your smiles and tears,
  Dead and un-born shall not He remember
Who folds our cry in His heart, and hears.

FOR THE EIGHTIETH BIRTHDAY OF GEORGE MEREDITH

A HEALTH, a ringing health, unto the king
  Of all our hearts to-day! But what proud song
  Should follow on the thought, nor do him wrong?
Except the sea were harp, each mirthful string
The lovely lightning of the nights of Spring,
  And Dawn the lonely listener, glad and grave
  With colours of the sea-shell and the wave
In brightening eye and cheek, there is none to sing!

Drink to him, as men upon an Alpine peak
  Brim one immortal cup of crimson wine,
    And into it drop one pure cold crust of snow,
Then hold it up, too rapturously to speak
  And drink—to the mountains, line on glittering line,
    Surging away into the sunset-glow.

IN MEMORY OF SWINBURNE

I

April from shore to shore, from sea to sea,
April in heaven and on the springing spray
Buoyant with birds that sing to welcome May
And April in those eyes that mourn for thee:
"This is my singing month; my hawthorn tree
Burgeons once more," we seemed to hear thee say,
"This is my singing month: my fingers stray
Over the lute. What shall the music be?"

And April answered with too great a song
For mortal lips to sing or hearts to hear,
Heard only of that high invisible throng
For whom thy song makes April all the year!
"My singing month, what bringest thou?" Her breath
Swooned with all music, and she answered—"Death."

II

Ah, but on earth,—"can'st thou, too, die,"
Low she whispers, "lover of mine?"
April, queen over earth and sky
Whispers, her trembling lashes shine:
"Wings of the sea, good-bye, good-bye,
Down to the dim sea-line."

Home to the heart of thine old-world lover,
Home to thy "fair green-girdled" sea!
There shall thy soul with the sea-birds hover,
Free of the deep as their wings are free;
Free, for the grave-flowers only cover
This, the dark cage of thee.

Thee, the storm-bird, nightingale-souled,
Brother of Sappho, the seas reclaim!
Age upon age have the great waves rolled
Mad with her music, exultant, aflame;
Thee, thee too, shall their glory enfold,
Lit with thy snow-winged fame.

Back, thro' the years, fleets the sea-bird's wing:
Sappho, of old time, once,—ah, hark!
So did he love her of old and sing!
Listen, he flies to her, back thro' the dark!
Sappho, of old time, once. . . . Yea, Spring
Calls him home to her, hark!

Sappho, long since, in the years far sped,
Sappho, I loved thee! Did I not seem
Fosterling only of earth? I have fled,
Fled to thee, sister. Time is a dream!
Shelley is here with us! Death lies dead!
Ah, how the bright waves gleam.

Wide was the cage-door, idly swinging;
April touched me and whispered "Come."
Out and away to the great deep winging,
Sister, I flashed to thee over the foam,
Out to the sea of Eternity, singing
"Mother, thy child comes home."

. . . . . .

Ah, but how shall we welcome May
Here where the wing of song droops low,
Here by the last green swinging spray
Brushed by the sea-bird's wings of snow,
We that gazed on his glorious way
Out where the great winds blow?

Here upon earth—"can'st thou, too, die,
Lover of life and lover of mine?"
April, conquering earth and sky
Whispers, her trembling lashes shine:
"Wings of the sea, good-bye, good-bye,
Down to the dim sea-line."

ON THE DEATH OF FRANCIS THOMPSON

I

How grandly glow the bays
  Purpureally enwound
With those rich thorns, the brows
  How infinitely crowned
That now thro' Death's dark house
  Have passed with royal gaze:
Purpureally enwound
  How grandly glow the bays.

II

Sweet, sweet and three-fold sweet,
  Pulsing with three-fold pain,
Where the lark fails of flight
  Soared the celestial strain;
Beyond the sapphire height
  Flew the gold-wingèd feet,
Beautiful, pierced with pain,
  Sweet, sweet and three-fold sweet;

III

And where *Is not* and *Is*
  Are wed in one sweet Name,
And the world's rootless vine
  With dew of stars a-flame
Laughs, from those deep divine
  Impossibilities,
Our reason all to shame—
  This cannot be, but is;

IV

Into the Vast, the Deep
  Beyond all mortal sight,
The Nothingness that conceived
  The worlds of day and night,

The Nothingness that heaved
  Pure sides in virgin sleep,
Brought out of Darkness, light;
  And man from out the Deep.

V

Into that Mystery
  Let not thine hand be thrust:
Nothingness is a world
  Thy science well may trust . . .
But lo, a leaf unfurled,
  Nay, a cry mocking thee
From the first grain of dust—
  I am, yet cannot be!

VI

Adventuring un-afraid
  Into that last deep shrine,
Must not the child-heart see
  Its deepest symbol shine,
The world's Birth-mystery,
  Whereto the suns are shade?
Lo, the white breast divine—
  The holy Mother-maid!

VII

How miss that Sacrifice,
  That cross of Yea and Nay,
That paradox of heaven
  Whose palms point either way,
Through each a nail being driven
  That the arms out-span the skies
And our earth-dust this day
  Out-sweeten Paradise.

VIII

We part the seamless robe,
  Our wisdom would divide
The raiment of the King,
  Our spear is in His side,
Even while the angels sing
  Around our perishing globe,
And Death re-knits in pride
  The seamless purple robe.

. . . . . .

IX

How grandly glow the bays
  Purpureally enwound
With those rich thorns, the brows
  How infinitely crowned
That now thro' Death's dark house
  Have passed with royal gaze:
Purpureally enwound
  How grandly glow the bays.

IN MEMORY OF MEREDITH

I

High on the mountains, who stands proudly, clad with the light of May,
Rich as the dawn, deep-hearted as night, diamond-bright as day,
Who, while the slopes of the beautiful valley throb with our muffled tread
Who, with the hill-flowers wound in her tresses, welcomes our deathless dead?

II

Is it not she whom he sought so long thro' the high lawns dewy and sweet,
Up thro' the crags and the glittering snows faint-flushed with her rosy feet,

Is it not she—the queen of our night—crowned by the unseen
sun,
Artemis, she that can see the light, when light upon earth is
none?

III

Huntress, queen of the dark of the world (no darker at night
than noon)
Beauty immortal and undefiled, the Eternal sun's white moon,
Only by thee and thy silver shafts for a flash can our hearts
discern,
Pierced to the quick, the love, the love that still thro' the dark
doth yearn.

IV

What to his soul were the hill-flowers, what the gold at the break
of day
Shot thro' the red-stemmed firs to the lake where the swimmer
clove his way,
What were the quivering harmonies showered from the heaven-
tossed heart of the lark,
Artemis, Huntress, what were these but thy keen shafts cleav-
ing the dark?

V

Frost of the hedge-row, flash of the jasmine, sparkle of dew on
the leaf,
Seas lit wide by the summer lightning, shafts from thy diamond
sheaf,
Deeply they pierced him, deeply he loved thee, now has he
found thy soul,
Artemis, thine, in this bridal peal, where we hear but the death-
bell toll.

THE TESTIMONY OF ART

As earth, sad earth, thrusts many a gloomy cape
  Into the sea's bright colour and living glee,
  So do we strive to embay that mystery
Which earthly hands must ever let escape;
The Word we seek for is the golden shape
  That shall enshrine the Soul we cannot see,
  A temporal chalice of Eternity
Purple with beating blood of the hallowed grape.

Once was it wine and sacramental bread
  Whereby we knew the power that through Him smiled
  When, in one still small utterance, He hurled
The Eternities beneath His feet and said
  With lips, O meek as any little child,
  Be of good cheer, I have overcome the world

THE SCHOLARS

Where is the scholar whose clear mind can hold
  The floral text of one sweet April mead?—
  The flowing lines, which few can spell indeed
Though most will note the scarlet and the gold
Around the flourishing capitals grandly scrolled;
  But ah, the subtle cadences that need
  The lover's heart, the lover's heart to read,
And ah, the songs unsung, the tales untold.

Poor fools-capped scholars—grammar keeps us close,
  The primers thrall us, and our eyes grow dim:
  When will old Master Science hear the call,
Bid us run free with life in every limb
  To breathe the poems and hear the last red rose
  Gossiping over God's grey garden-wall?

RESURRECTION

Once more I hear the everlasting sea
Breathing beneath the mountain's fragrant breast,
Come unto Me, come unto Me,
And I will give you rest.

We have destroyed the Temple and in three days
He hath rebuilt it—all things are made new:
And hark what wild throats pour His praise
Beneath the boundless blue.

We plucked down all His altars, cried aloud
And gashed ourselves for little gods of clay!
Yon floating cloud was but a cloud,
The May no more than May.

We plucked down all His altars, left not one
Save where, perchance (and ah, the joy was fleet),
We laid our garlands in the sun
At the white Sea-born's feet.

We plucked down all His altars, not to make
The small praise greater, but the great praise less,
We sealed all fountains where the soul could slake
Its thirst and weariness.

"Love" was too small, too human to be found
In that transcendent source whence love was born:
We talked of "forces": heaven was crowned
With philosophic thorn.

"Your God is in your image," we cried, but O,
'Twas only man's own deepest heart ye gave,
Knowing that He transcended all ye know,
While we—we dug His grave.

Denied Him even the crown on our own brow,
E'en these poor symbols of His loftier reign,
Levelled His Temple with the dust, and now
He is risen, He is risen again,

Risen, like this resurrection of the year,
  This grand ascension of the choral spring.
Which those harp-crowded heavens bend to hear
  And meet upon the wing.

"He is dead," we cried, and even amid that gloom
  The wintry veil was rent! The new-born day
Showed us the Angel seated in the tomb
  And the stone rolled away.

It is the hour! We challenge heaven above
  Now, to deny our slight ephemeral breath
Joy, anguish, and that everlasting love
  Which triumphs over death.

A JAPANESE LOVE-SONG

I

The young moon is white,
  But the willows are blue:
Your small lips are red,
  But the great clouds are grey:
The waves are so many
  That whisper to you;
But my love is only
  One flight of spray.

II

The bright drops are many,
  The dark wave is one:
The dark wave subsides,
  And the bright sea remains!
And wherever, O singing
  Maid, you may run,
You are one with the world
  For all your pains.

III

Though the great skies are dark,
And your small feet are white,
Though your wide eyes are blue
And the closed poppies red,
Tho' the kisses are many
That colour the night,
They are linked like pearls
On one golden thread.

IV

Were the grey clouds not made
For the red of your mouth;
The ages for flight
Of the butterfly years;
The sweet of the peach
For the pale lips of drouth,
The sunlight of smiles
For the shadow of tears?

V

Love, Love is the thread
That has pierced them with bliss!
All their hues are but notes
In one world-wide tune:
Lips, willows, and waves,
We are one as we kiss,
And your face and the flowers
Faint away in the moon.

THE TWO PAINTERS

(A TALE OF OLD JAPAN.)

I

Yoichi Tenko, the painter,
Dwelt by the purple sea,
Painting the peacock islands
Under his willow-tree:

Also in temples he painted
  Dragons of old Japan,
With a child to look at the pictures—
  Little O Kimi San.

Kimi, the child of his brother,
  Bright as the moon in May,
White as a lotus lily,
  Pink as a plum-tree spray,
Linking her soft arm round him
  Sang to his heart for an hour,
Kissed him with ripples of laughter
  And lips of the cherry flower.

Child of the old pearl-fisher
  Lost in his junk at sea,
Kimi was loved of Tenko
  As his own child might be,
Yoichi Tenko the painter,
  Wrinkled and grey and old,
Teacher of many disciples
  That paid for his dreams with gold.

II

Peonies, peonies crowned the May!
Clad in blue and white array
  Came Sawara to the school
Under the silvery willow-tree,
  All to learn of Tenko!
Riding on a milk-white mule,
  Young and poor and proud was he,
Lissom as a cherry spray
(Peonies, peonies, crowned the day!)
And he rode the golden way
  To the school of Tenko.

Swift to learn, beneath his hand
Soon he watched his wonderland
  Growing cloud by magic cloud,
Under the silvery willow-tree
  In the school of Tenko:
Kimi watched him, young and proud,
  Painting by the purple sea,
Lying on the golden sand
Watched his golden wings expand!
(None but Love will understand
  All she hid from Tenko.)

He could paint her tree and flower,
Sea and spray and wizard's tower,
  With one stroke, now hard, now soft,
Under the silvery willow-tree
  In the school of Tenko:
He could fling a bird aloft,
  Splash a dragon in the sea,
Crown a princess in her bower,
With one stroke of magic power;
And she watched him, hour by hour,
  In the school of Tenko.

Yoichi Tenko, wondering, scanned
All the work of that young hand,
  Gazed his kakemonos o'er,
Under the silvery willow-tree
  In the school of Tenko:
"I can teach you nothing more,
  Thought or craft or mystery;
Let your golden wings expand,
They will shadow half the land,
All the world's at your command,
  Come no more to Tenko."

Lying on the golden sand,
Kimi watched his wings expand;
Wept.—He could not understand
  Why she wept, said Tenko.

III

So, in her blue kimono,
Pale as the sickle moon
Glimmered thro' soft plum-branches
Blue in the dusk of June,
Stole she, willing and waning,
Frightened and unafraid,—
"Take me with you, Sawara,
Over the sea," she said.

Small and sadly beseeching,
Under the willow-tree,
Glimmered her face like a foam-flake
Drifting over the sea:
Pale as a drifting blossom,
Lifted her face to his eyes:
Slowly he gathered and held her
Under the drifting skies.

Poor little face cast backward,
Better to see his own,
Earth and heaven went past them
Drifting: they two, alone
Stood, immortal. He whispered—
"Nothing can part us two!"
Backward her sad little face went
Drifting, and dreamed it true.

"Others are happy," she murmured,
"Maidens and men I have seen;
You are my king, Sawara,
O, let me be your queen!
If I am all too lowly,"
Sadly she strove to smile,
"Let me follow your footsteps,
Your slave for a little while."

Surely, he thought, I have painted
Nothing so fair as this
Moonlit almond blossom
Sweet to fold and kiss,

Brow that is filled with music,
Shell of a faery sea,
Eyes like the holy violets
Brimmed with dew for me.

"Wait for Sawara," he whispered,
"Does not his whole heart yearn
Now to his moon-bright maiden?
Wait, for he will return
Rich as the wave on the moon's path
Rushing to claim his bride!"
So they plighted their promise,
And the ebbing sea-wave sighed.

IV

Moon and flower and butterfly,
Earth and heaven went drifting by,
Three long years while Kimi dreamed
Under the silvery willow-tree
In the school of Tenko,
Steadfast while the whole world streamed
Past her tow'rds Eternity;
Steadfast till with one great cry,
Ringing to the gods on high,
Golden wings should blind the sky
And bring him back to Tenko.

Three long years and nought to say
"Sweet, I come the golden way,
Riding royally to the school
Under the silvery willow-tree
Claim my bride of Tenko;
Silver bells on a milk-white mule,
Rose-red sails on an emerald sea!" . . .
Kimi sometimes went to pray
In the temple nigh the bay,
Dreamed all night and gazed all day
Over the sea from Tenko.

Far away his growing fame
Lit the clouds. No message came
From the sky, whereon she gazed
Under the silvery willow-tree
Far away from Tenko!
Small white hands in the temple raised
Pleaded with the Mystery,—
"Stick of incense in the flame,
Though my love forget my name,
Help him, bless him, all the same,
And . . . bring him back to Tenko!"

Rose-white temple nigh the bay,
Hush! for Kimi comes to pray,
Dream all night and gaze all day
Over the sea from Tenko.

V

So, when the rich young merchant
Showed him his bags of gold,
Yoichi Tenko, the painter,
Gave him her hand to hold,
Said: "You shall wed him, O Kimi."
Softly he lied and smiled—
"*Yea, for Sawara is wedded!*
Let him not mock you, child."

Dumbly she turned and left them,
Never a word or cry
Broke from her lips' grey petals
Under the drifting sky:
Down to the spray and the rainbows,
Where she had watched him of old
Painting the rose-red islands,
Painting the sand's wet gold,

Down to their dreams of the sunset,
Frail as a flower's white ghost,
Lonely and lost she wandered
Down to the darkening coast:

Lost in the drifting midnight,
  Weeping, desolate, blind.
Many went out to seek her:
  Never a heart could find.

Yoichi Tenko, the painter,
  Plucked from his willow-tree
Two big paper lanterns
  And ran to the brink of the sea;
Over his head he held them,
  Crying, and only heard,
Somewhere, out in the darkness,
  The cry of a wandering bird.

VI

Peonies, peonies thronged the May
When in royal-rich array
  Came Sawara to the school
Under the silvery willow-tree—
  To the school of Tenko!
Silver bells on a milk-white mule,
  Rose-red sails on an emerald sea!
Over the bloom of the cherry spray,
Peonies, peonies dimmed the day;
And he rode the royal way
  Back to Yoichi Tenko.

Yoichi Tenko, half afraid,
Whispered, "Wed some other maid;
  Kimi left me all alone
Under the silvery willow-tree,
  Left me," whispered Tenko,
"Kimi had a heart of stone!"—
  "Kimi, Kimi? Who is she?
Kimi? Ah—the child that played
Round the willow-tree. She prayed
Often; and, whate'er I said,
  She believed it, Tenko."

He had come to paint anew
Those dim isles of rose and blue,
  For a palace far away,
Under the silvery willow-tree—
  So he said to Tenko;
And he painted, day by day,
  Golden visions of the sea.
No, he had not come to woo;
Yet, had Kimi proven true,
Doubtless he had loved her too,
  Hardly less than Tenko.

Since the thought was in his head,
He would make his choice and wed;
  And a lovely maid he chose
Under the silvery willow-tree.
  "Fairer far," said Tenko.
"Kimi had a twisted nose,
  And a foot too small, for me,
And her face was dull as lead!"
"Nay, a flower, be it white or red,
Is a flower," Sawara said!
  "So it is," said Tenko.

VII

Great Sawara, the painter,
  Sought, on a day of days,
One of the peacock islands
  Out in the sunset haze:
Rose-red sails on the water
  Carried him quickly nigh;
There would he paint him a wonder
  Worthy of Hokusai.

Lo, as he leapt o'er the creaming
  Roses of faery foam,
Out of the green-lipped caverns
  Under the isle's blue dome,

White as a drifting snow-flake,
  White as the moon's white flame,
White as a ghost from the darkness,
  Little O Kimi came.

"Long I have waited, Sawara,
  Here in our sunset isle,
Sawara, Sawara, Sawara,
  Look on me once, and smile;
Face I have watched so long for,
  Hands I have longed to hold,
Sawara, Sawara, Sawara,
  Why is your heart so cold?"

Surely, he thought, I have painted
  Nothing so fair as this
Moonlit almond blossom
  Sweet to fold and kiss. . . .
"Kimi," he said, "I am wedded!
  Hush, for it could not be!"
"Kiss me one kiss," she whispered,
  "Me also, even me."

Small and terribly drifting
  Backward, her sad white face
Lifted up to Sawara
  Once, in that lonely place,
White as a drifting blossom
  Under his wondering eyes,
Slowly he gathered and held her
  Under the drifting skies.

"Others are happy," she whispered,
  "Maidens and men I have seen:
Be happy, be happy, Sawara!
  The other—shall be—your queen!
Kiss me one kiss for parting."
  Trembling she lifted her head,
Then like a broken blossom
  It fell on his arm. She was dead.

VIII

Much impressed, Sawara straight
(Though the hour was growing late)
  Made a sketch of Kimi lying
By the lonely, sighing sea,
  Brought it back to Tenko.
Tenko looked it over crying
  (Under the silvery willow-tree).
"You have burst the golden gate!
You have conquered Time and Fate!
Hokusai is not so great!
  This is Art," said Tenko!

THE ENCHANTED ISLAND

I

I REMEMBER—
  a breath, a breath
  Blown thro' the rosy gates of birth,
  A morning freshness not of the earth
But cool and strange and lovely as death
  In Paradise, in Paradise,
When, all to suffer the old sweet pain
  Closing his immortal eyes
  Wonder-wild an angel lies
With wings of rainbow-tinctured grain
  Withering till—ah, wonder-wild,
Here on the dawning earth again
  He wakes, a little child.

II

I remember—
  a gleam, a gleam
  Of sparkling waves and warm blue sky
Far away and long ago,
  Or ever I knew that youth could die;
And out of the dawn, the dawn, the dawn,
Into the unknown life we sailed
  As out of sleep into a dream,
And, as with elfin cables drawn

In dusk of purple over the glowing
Wrinkled measureless emerald sea,
The light cloud shadows larger far
Than the sweet shapes which drew them on,
Elfin exquisite shadows flowing
Between us and the morning star
Chased us all a summer's day,
And our sail like a dew-lit blossom shone
Till, over a rainbow haze of spray
That arched a reef of surf like snow
—Far away and long ago—
We saw the sky-line rosily engrailed
With tufted peaks above a smooth lagoon
Which growing, growing, growing as we sailed
Curved all around them like a crescent moon;
And then we saw the purple-shadowed creeks,
The feathery palms, the gleaming golden streaks
Of sand, and nearer yet, like jewels of fire
Streaming between the boughs, or floating higher
Like tiny sunset-clouds in noon-day skies,
The birds of Paradise.

III

The island floated in the air,
Its image floated in the sea:
Which was the shadow? Both were fair:
Like sister souls they seemed to be;
And one was dreaming and asleep,
And one bent down from Paradise
To kiss with radiance in the deep
The darkling lips and eyes.

And, mingling softly in their dreams,
That holy kiss of sea and sky
Transfused the shadows and the gleams
Of Time and of Eternity:
The dusky face looked up and gave
To heaven its golden shadowed calm;
The face of light fulfilled the wave
With blissful wings and fans of palm.

Above, the tufted rosy peaks
  That melted in the warm blue skies,
Below, the purple-shadowed creeks
  That glassed the birds of Paradise—
A bridal knot, it hung in heaven;
  And, all around, the still lagoon
From bloom of dawn to blush of even
  Curved like a crescent moon.

And there we wandered evermore
  Thro' boyhood's everlasting years,
Listening the murmur of the shore
  As one that lifts a shell and hears
The murmur of forgotten seas
  Around some lost Broceliande,
The sigh of sweet Eternities
  That turn the world to fairy-land,

That turned our isle to a single pearl
  Glowing in measureless waves of wine!
Above, below, the clouds would curl,
  Above, below, the stars would shine
In sky and sea. We hung in heaven!
  Time and space were but elfin-sweet
Rock-bound pools for the dawn and even
  To wade with their rosy feet.

Our pirate cavern faced the West:
  We closed its door with screens of palm,
While some went out to seek the nest
  Wherein the Phœnix, breathing balm,
Burns and dies to live for ever
  (How should we dream we lived to die?)
And some would fish in the purple river
  That thro' the hills brought down the sky.

And some would dive in the lagoon
  Like sunbeams, and all round our isle
Swim thro' the lovely crescent moon,
  Glimpsing, for breathless mile on mile,

The wild sea-woods that bloomed below,
The rainbow fish, the coral cave
Where vanishing swift as melting snow
A mermaid's arm would wave.

Then dashing shoreward thro' the spray
On sun-lit sands they cast them down,
Or in the white sea-daisies lay
With sun-stained bodies rosy-brown,
Content to watch the foam-bows flee
Across the shelving reefs and bars,
With wild eyes gazing out to sea
Like happy haunted stars.

IV

And O, the wild sea-maiden
Drifting through the starlit air,
With white arms blossom-laden
And the sea-scents in her hair:
Sometimes we heard her singing
The midnight forest through,
Or saw a soft hand flinging
Blossoms drenched with starry dew
Into the dreaming purple cave;
And, sometimes, far and far away
Beheld across the glooming wave
Beyond the dark lagoon,
Beyond the silvery foaming bar,
The black bright rock whereon she lay
Like a honey-coloured star
Singing to the breathless moon,
Singing in the silent night
Till the stars for sheer delight
Closed their eyes, and drowsy birds
In the midmost forest spray
Took their heads from out their wings,
Thinking—it is Ariel sings
And we must catch the witching words
And sing them o'er by day.

V

And then, there came a breath, a breath
Cool and strange and dark as death,
A stealing shadow, not of the earth
But fresh and wonder-wild as birth.
I know not when the hour began
That changed the child's heart in the man,
Or when the colours began to wane,
But all our roseate island lay
Stricken, as when an angel dies
With wings of rainbow-tinctured grain
Withering, and his radiant eyes
Closing. Pitiless walls of grey
Gathered around us, a growing tomb
From which it seemed not death or doom
Could roll the stone away.

VI

Yet—I remember—
a gleam, a gleam,
(Or ever I dreamed that youth could die!)
Of sparkling waves and warm blue sky
As out of sleep into a dream,
Wonder-wild for the old sweet pain,
We sailed into that unknown sea
Through the gates of Eternity.

Peacefully close your mortal eyes
For ye shall wake to it again
In Paradise, in Paradise.

I

HEART of my heart, the world is young;
Love lies hidden in every rose!
Every song that the skylark sung
Once, we thought, must come to a close:

Now we know the spirit of song,
  Song that is merged in the chant of the whole,
Hand in hand as we wander along,
  What should we doubt of the years that roll?

II

Heart of my heart, we cannot die!
  Love triumphant in flower and tree,
Every life that laughs at the sky
  Tells us nothing can cease to be:
One, we are one with a song to-day,
  One with the clover that scents the wold,
One with the Unknown, far away,
  One with the stars, when earth grows old.

III

Heart of my heart, we are one with the wind,
  One with the clouds that are whirled o'er the lea,
One in many, O broken and blind,
  One as the waves are at one with the sea!
Ay! when life seems scattered apart,
  Darkens, ends as a tale that is told,
One, we are one, O heart of my heart,
  One, still one, while the world grows old.

THE HILL-FLOWER

It is my faith that every flower
  Enjoys the air it breathes—
So was it sung one golden hour
  Among the woodbine wreaths;
And yet, though wet with living dew,
The song seemed far more sweet than true.

Blind creatures of the sun and air
  I dreamed it but a dream
That, like Narcissus, would confer
  With self in every stream,
And to the leaves and boughs impart
The tremors of a human heart.

To-day a golden pinion stirred
  The world's Bethesda pool,
And I believed the song I heard
  Nor put my heart to school;
And through the rainbows of the dream
I saw the gates of Eden gleam.

The rain had ceased. The great hills rolled
  In silence to the deep:
The gorse in waves of green and gold
  Perfumed their lonely sleep;
And, at my feet, one elfin flower
Drooped, blind with glories of the shower.

I stooped—a giant from the sky—
  Above its piteous shield,
And, suddenly, the dream went by,
  And there—was heaven revealed!
I stooped to pluck it; but my hand
Paused, mid-way, o'er its fairyland.

Not of mine own was that strange voice,
  "Pluck—tear a star from heaven!"
Mine only was the awful choice
  To scoff and be forgiven
Or hear the very grass I trod
Whispering the gentle thoughts of God.

I know not if the hill-flower's place
  Beneath that mighty sky,
Its lonely and aspiring grace,
  Its beauty born to die,
Touched me, I know it seemed to be
Cherished by all Eternity.

Man, doomed to crush at every stride
  A hundred lives like this
Which by their weakness were allied,
  If by naught else, to his,
Can only for a flash discern
What passion through the whole doth yearn.

Not into words can I distil
  The pity or the pain
Which hallowing all that lonely hill
  Cried out "Refrain, refrain,"
Then breathed from earth and sky and sea,
"Herein you did it unto Me."

Somewhile that hill was heaven's own breast,
  The flower its joy and grief,
Hugged close and fostered and caressed
  In every brief bright leaf:
And, ere I went thro' sun and dew,
I leant and gently touched it, too.

ACTÆON

"Who stood beside the naked Swift-footed
And bound his forehead with Proserpine's hair."
—Browning (*Pauline*)

I

Light of beauty, O, "perfect in whiteness,"
  Softly suffused thro' the world's dark shrouds,
Kindling them all as they pass by thy brightness,—
  Hills, men, cities,—a pageant of clouds,
Thou to whom Life and Time surrender
  All earth's forms as to heaven's deep care,
Who shall pierce to thy naked splendour,
  Bind his brows with thy hair?

II

Swift thro' the sprays when Spring grew bolder
  Young Actæon swept to the chase!
Golden the fawn-skin, back from the shoulder
  Flowing, set free the limbs' lithe grace,
Muscles of satin that rippled like sunny
  Streams—a hunter, a young athlete,
Scattering dews and crushing out honey
  Under his sandalled feet.

III

Sunset softened the crags of the mountain,
  Silence melted the hunter's heart,
Only the sob of a falling fountain
  Pulsed in a deep ravine apart:
All the forest seemed waiting breathless,
  Eager to whisper the dying day
Some rich word that should utter the deathless
  Secret of youth and May.

IV

Down, as to May thro' the flowers that attend her,
  Slowly, on tip-toe, down the ravine
Fair as the sun-god, poising a slender
  Spear like a moon-shaft silver and green,
Stole he! Ah, did the oak-wood ponder
  Youth's glad dream in its heart of gloom?
Dryad or fawn was it started yonder?
  Ah, what whisper of doom?

V

Gold, thro' the ferns as he gazed and listened,
  Shone the soul of the wood's deep dream,
One bright glade and a pool that glistened
  Full in the face of the sun's last gleam,—

Gold in the heart of a violet dingle!
Young Actæon, beware! beware!
Who shall track, while the pulses tingle,
Spring to her woodland lair?

VI

See, at his feet, what mystical quiver,
Maiden's girdle and robe of snow,
Tossed aside by the green glen-river
Ere she bathed in the pool below?
All the fragance of April meets him
Full in the face with its young sweet breath;
Yet, as he steals to the glade, there greets him—
Hush, what whisper of death?

VII

Lo, in the violets, lazily dreaming,
Young Diana, the huntress, lies:
One white side thro' the violets gleaming
Heaves and sinks with her golden sighs,
One white breast like a diamond crownet
Couched in a velvet casket glows,
One white arm, tho' the violets drown it,
Thrills their purple with rose.

VIII

Buried in fragrance, the half-moon flashes,
Beautiful, clouded, from head to heel:
One white foot in the warm wave plashes,
Violets tremble and half reveal,
Half conceal, as they kiss, the slender
Slope and curve of her sleeping limbs:
Violets bury one half the splendour
Still, as thro' heaven, she swims.

IX

Cold as the white rose waking at daybreak
  Lifts the light of her lovely face,
Poised on an arm she watches the spray break
  Over the slim white ankle's grace,
Watches the wave that sleeplessly tosses
  Kissing the pure foot's pink sea-shells,
Watches the long-leaved heaven-dark mosses
  Drowning their star-bright bells.

X

Swift as the Spring where the South has brightened
  Earth with bloom in one passionate night,
Swift as the violet heavens had lightened
  Swift to perfection, blinding, white,
Dian arose: and Actæon saw her,
  Only he since the world began!
Only in dreams could Endymion draw her
  Down to the heart of man.

XI

Fair as the dawn upon Himalaya
  Anger flashed from her cheek's pure rose,
Alpine peaks at the passage of Maia
  Flushed not fair as her breasts' white snows.
Ah, fair form of the heaven's completeness,
  Who shall sing thee or who shall say
Whence that "high perfection of sweetness,"
  Perfect to save or slay?

XII

Perfect in beauty, beauty the portal
  Here on earth to the world's deep shrine,
Beauty hidden in all things mortal,
  Who shall mingle his eyes with thine?

Thou, to whom Life and Death surrender
All earth's forms as to heaven's deep care,
Who shall pierce to thy naked splendour,
Bind his brows with thy hair?

XIII

Beauty, perfect in blinding whiteness,
Softly suffused thro' the world's dark shrouds,
Kindling them all as they pass by her brightness,—
Hills, men, cities,—a pageant of clouds,
She, the unchanging, shepherds their changes,
Bids them mingle and form and flow,
Flowers and flocks and the great hill-ranges
Follow her cry and go.

XIV

Swift as the sweet June lightning flashes,
Down she stoops to the purpling pool,
Sudden and swift her white hand dashes
Rainbow mists in his eyes! "Ah, fool!
Hunter," she cries to the young Actæon,
"Change to the hunted, rise and fly,
Swift ere the wild pack utter its pæan,
Swift for thy hounds draw nigh!"

XV

Lo, as he trembles, the greenwood branches
Dusk his brows with their antlered pride!
Lo, as a stag thrown back on its haunches
Quivers, with velvet nostrils wide,
Lo, he changes! The soft fur darkens
Down to the fetlock's lifted fear!—
Hounds are baying!—he snuffs and hearkens,
"Fly, for the stag is here!"

XVI

Swift as he leapt thro' the ferns, Actæon,
  Young Actæon, the lordly stag,
Full and mellow the deep-mouthed pæan
  Swelled behind him from crag to crag:
Well he remembered that sweet throat leading,
  Wild with terror he raced and strained,
On thro' the darkness, thorn-swept, bleeding:
  Ever they gained and gained!

XVII

Death, like a darkling huntsman holloed—
  Swift, Actæon!—desire and shame
Leading the pack of the passions followed.
  Red jaws frothing with white-hot flame,
Volleying out of the glen, they leapt up,
  Snapped and fell short of the foam-flecked thighs. . .
Inch by terrible inch they crept up,
  Shadows with blood-shot eyes.

XVIII

Still with his great heart bursting asunder
  Still thro' the night he struggled and bled;
Suddenly round him the pack's low thunder
  Surged, the hounds that his own hand fed
Fastened in his throat, with red jaws drinking
  Deep!—for a moment his antlered pride
Soared o'er their passionate seas, then, sinking,
  Fell for the fangs to divide.

XIX

Light of beauty, O, perfect in whiteness,
  Softly suffused thro' the years' dark veils,
Kindling them all as they pass by her brightness,
  Filling our hearts with her old-world tales,

She, the unchanging, shepherds their changes,
Bids them mingle and form and flow,
Flowers and flocks and the great hill-ranges
Follow her cry and go.

XX

Still, in the violets, lazily dreaming
Young Diana, the huntress, lies:
One white side thro' the violets gleaming
Heaves and sinks with her golden sighs;
One white breast like a diamond crownet
Couched in a velvet casket glows,
One white arm, tho' the violets drown it,
Thrills their purple with rose.

LUCIFER'S FEAST

(A EUROPEAN NIGHTMARE.)

To celebrate the ascent of man, one gorgeous night
Lucifer gave a feast.
Its world-bewildering light
Danced in Belshazzar's tomb, and the old kings dead and gone
Felt their dust creep to jewels in crumbling Babylon.

Two nations were His guests—the top and flower of Time,
The fore-front of an age which now had learned to climb
The slopes where Newton knelt, the heights that Shakespeare trod,
The mountains whence Beethoven rolled the voice of God.

Lucifer's feasting-lamps were like the morning stars,
But at the board-head shone the blood-red lamp of Mars.

League upon glittering league, white front and flabby face
Bent o'er the groaning board. Twelve brave men droned the grace;
But with instinctive tact, in courtesy to their Host,
Omitted God the Son and God the Holy Ghost,
And to the God of Battles raised their humble prayers.

Then, then, like thunder, all the guests drew up their chairs.
By each a drinking-cup, yellow, almost, as gold.
(*The blue eye-sockets gave the thumbs a good firm hold*)
Adorned the flowery board. Could even brave men shrink?

Why if the cups *were* skulls, they had red wine to drink!
And had not each a napkin, white and peaked and proud,
Waiting to wipe his mouth? A napkin? Nay, a shroud!
This was a giant's feast, on hell's imperial scale.
The blades glistened.
The shrouds—O, in one snowy gale,
The pink hands fluttered them out, and spread them on their knees.
Who knew what gouts might drop, what filthy flakes of grease,
Now that o'er every shoulder, through the coiling steam,
Inhuman faces peered, with wolfish eyes a-gleam,
And grey-faced vampire Lusts that whinneyed in each ear
Hints of the hideous courses?
None may name them here?
None? And we may not see! The distant cauldrons cloak
The lava-coloured plains with clouds of umber smoke.
Nay, by that shrapnel-light, by those wild shooting stars
That rip the clouds away with fiercer fire than Mars,
They are painted sharp as death. If these can eat and drink
Chatter and laugh and rattle their knives, why should we shrink
From empty names? We know those ghastly gleams are true:
Why should Christ cry again—*They know not what they do.*'
They, heirs of all the ages, sons of Shakespeare's land,
They, brothers of Beethoven, smiling, cultured, bland,
Whisper with sidling heads to ghouls with bloody lips.

Each takes upon his plate a small round thing that drips
And quivers, a child's heart.

Miles on miles
The glittering table bends o'er that first course, and smiles;
For, through the wreaths of smoke, the grey Lusts bear aloft
The second course, on leaden chargers, large and soft,
Bodies of women, steaming in an opal mist,
Red-branded here and there where vampire-teeth have kissed,

But white as pig's flesh, newly killed, and cleanly dressed,
A lemon in each mouth and roses round each breast,
Emblems to show how deeply, sweetly satisfied,
The breasts, the lips, can sleep, whose children fought and
died
For—what? For country? God, once more Thy shrapnel-
light!

Let those dark slaughter-houses burst upon our sight,
These kitchens are too clean, too near the tiring room!
Let Thy white shrapnel rend those filthier veils of gloom,
Rip the last fogs away and strip the foul thing bare!
One lightning-picture—see—yon bayonet-bristling square
Mown down, mown down, mown down, wild swathes of crimson
wheat,
The white-eyed charge, the blast, the terrible retreat,
The blood-greased wheels of cannon thundering into line
O'er that red writhe of pain, rent groin and shattered spine,
The moaning faceless face that kissed its child last night,
The raw pulp of the heart that beat for love's delight,
The heap of twisting bodies, clotted and congealed
In one red huddle of anguish on the loathsome field,
The seas of obscene slaughter spewing their blood-red yeast,
Multitudes pouring out their entrails for the feast,
Knowing not why, but dying, they think, for some high cause,
Dying for "hearth and home," their flags, their creeds, their
laws.
Ask of the Bulls and Bears, ask if they understand
How both great grappling armies bleed for their own land;
For in that faith they die! These hoodwinked thousands die
Simply as heroes, gulled by hell's profoundest lie.
Who keeps the slaughter-house? Not these, not these who
gain
Nought but the sergeant's shilling and the homeless pain!
Who pulls the ropes? Not these, who buy their crust of bread
With the salt sweat of labour! These but bury their dead
Then sweat again for food!
Christ, is the hour not come,
To send forth one great voice and strike this dark hell dumb,
A voice to out-crash the cannon, one united cry
To sweep these wild-beast standards down that stain the sky,

To hurl these Lions and Bears and Eagles to their doom,
One voice, one heart, one soul, one fire that shall consume
The last red reeking shreds that flicker against the blast
And purge the Augean stalls we call "our glorious past"!
One voice from dawn and sunset, one almighty voice,
Full-throated as the sea—ye sons o' the earth, rejoice!
Beneath the all-loving sky, confederate kings ye stand,
Fling open wide the gates o' the world-wide Fatherland.

. . . . . .

Poor fools, we dare not dream it! We that pule and whine
Of art and science, we, whose great souls leave no shrine
Unshattered, we that climb the Sinai Shakespeare trod,
The Olivets where Beethoven walked and talked with God,
We that have weighed the stars and reined the lightning, we
That stare thro' heaven and plant our footsteps in the sea,
We whose great souls have risen so far above the creeds
That we can jest at Christ and leave Him where He bleeds,
A legend of the dark, a tale so false or true
That howsoe'er we jest at Him, the jest sounds new.
(Our weariest dinner-tables never tire of that!
Let the clown sport with Christ, never the jest falls flat!)
Poor fools, we dare not dream a dream so strange, so great,
As on this ball of dust to found one "world-wide state,"
To float one common flag above our little lands,
And ere our little sun grows cold to clasp our hands
In friendship for a moment!

. . . . . .

Hark, the violins
Are swooning through the mist. The great blue band begins,
Playing, in dainty scorn, a hymn we used to know,
How long was it, ten thousand thousand years ago?

There is a green hill far away
Beside a City wall!—
And O, the music swung a-stray
With a solemn dying fall;
For it was a pleasant jest to play
Hymns in the Devil's Hall.

And yet, and yet, if aught be true,
  This dream we left behind,
This childish Christ, be-mocked anew
  To please the men of mind,
Yet hung so far beyond the flight
  Of our most lofty thought
That—Lucifer laughed *at* us that night,
  Not *with* us, as he ought.

Beneath the blood-red lamp of Mars,
  Cloaked with a scarlet cloud
He gazed along the line of stars
  Above the guzzling crowd:
Sinister, thunder-scarred, he raised
  His great world-wandering eyes,
And on some distant vision gazed
  Beyond our cloudy skies.

"Poor bats," he sneered, *"their jungle-dark*
  Civilisation's noon!
Poor wolves, that hunt in packs and bark
  Beneath the grinning moon;
Poor fools, that cast the cross away,
  Before they break the sword;
Poor sots, who take the night for day;
  Have mercy on me, Lord.

"Beyond their wisdom's deepest skies
  I see Thee hanging yet,
The love still hungering in Thine eyes,
  Thy plaited crown still wet!
Thine arms outstretched to fold them all
  Beneath Thy sheltering breast;
But—since they will not hear Thy call,
  Lord, I forbear to jest.

"Lord, I forbear! The day I fell
  I fell at least thro' pride!
Rather than these should share my hell
  Take me, thou Crucified!

O, let me share Thy cross of grief,
And let me work Thy will,
As morning star, or dying thief.
Thy fallen angel still.

"Lord, I forbear! For Thee, at least,
In pain so like to mine,
The mighty meaning of their feast
Is plain as bread and wine:
O, smile once more, far off, alone!
Since these nor hear nor see,
From my deep hell, so like Thine own,
Lord Christ, I pity Thee."

Yet once again, he thought, they shall be fully tried,
If they be devils or fools too light for hell's deep pride.

The champ of teeth was over, and the reeking room
Gaped for the speeches now. Across the sulphurous fume
Lucifer gave a sign. The guests stood thundering up!
"Gentlemen, charge your glasses!"
Every yellow cup
Frothed with the crimson blood. They brandished them on high!
"Gentlemen, drink to those who fight and know not why!"

And in the bubbling blood each nose was buried deep.
"Gentlemen, drink to those who sowed that we might reap!
Drink to the pomp, pride, circumstance, of glorious war,
The grand self-sacrifice that made us what we are!
And drink to the peace-lovers who believe that peace
Is War, red, bloody War; for War can never cease
Unless we drain the veins of peace to fatten WAR!
Gentlemen, drink to the brains that made us what we are!
Drink to self-sacrifice that helps us all to shake
The world with tramp of armies. Germany, awake!
England, awake! Shakespeare's, Beethoven's Fatherland,
Are you not both aware, do you not understand,

Self-sacrifice is competition? It is the law
Of Life, and so, though both of you are wholly right,
Self-sacrifice requires that both of you should fight."
And "Hoch! hoch! hoch!" they cried; and "Hip, hip, hip,
Hurrah!"

This raised the gorge of Lucifer. With one deep "Bah,"
Above those croaking toads he towered like Gabriel;

Then straightway left the table and went home to hell.

VETERANS

(WRITTEN FOR THE RELIEF FUND OF THE CRIMEAN VETERANS.)

I

WHEN the last charge sounds
And the battle thunders o'er the plain,
Thunders o'er the trenches where the red streams flow,
Will it not be well with us,
Veterans, veterans,
If, beneath your torn old flag, we burst upon the foe?

II

When the last post sounds
And the night is on the battle-field,
Night and rest at last from all the tumult of our wars,
Will it not be well with us,
Veterans, veterans,
If, with duty done like yours, we lie beneath the stars?

III

When the great reveille sounds
For the terrible last Sabaoth,
All the legions of the dead shall hear the trumpet ring!
Will it not be well with us,
Veterans, veterans,
If, beneath your torn old flag, we rise to meet our King?

THE QUEST RENEWED

It is too soon, too soon, though time be brief,
Quite to forswear thy quest,
O Light, whose farewell dyes the falling leaf,
Fades thro' the fading west.

Thou'rt flown too soon! I stretch my hands out still.
O, Light of Life, to Thee,
Who leav'st an Olivet in each far blue hill,
A sorrow on every sea.

It is too soon, here while the loud world roars
For wealth and power and fame,
Too soon quite to forget those other shores
Afar, from whence I came;

Too soon even to forget the first dear dream
Dreamed far away, when tears could freely flow;
And life seemed infinite, as that sky's great gleam
Deepened, to which I go;

Too soon even to forget the fluttering fire
And those old books beside the friendly hearth,
When time seemed endless as my own desire,
And angels walked our earth;

Too soon quite to forget amid the throng
What once the silent hills, the sounding beach
Taught me—where singing was the prize of song,
And heaven within my reach.

It is too soon amid the cynic sneers,
The sophist smiles, the greedy mouths and hands,
Quite to forget the light of those dead years
And my lost mountain-lands;

Too soon to lose that everlasting hope
(For so it seemed) of youth in love's pure reign,
Though while I linger on this darkening slope
Nought seems quite worth the pain.

It is too soon for me to break that trust,
O, Light of Light, flown far past sun and moon,
Burn back thro' this dark panoply of dust;
Or let me follow—soon.

THE LIGHTS OF HOME

Pilot, how far from home?—
Not far, not far to-night,
A flight of spray, a sea-bird's flight,
A flight of tossing foam,
And then the lights of home!—

And, yet again, how far?
And seems the way so brief?
Those lights beyond the roaring reef
Were lights of moon and star,
Far, far, none knows how far!

Pilot, how far from home?—
The great stars pass away
Before Him as a flight of spray,
Moons as a flight of foam!
I see the lights of home.

NEW POEMS

'TWEEN THE LIGHTS

"The Nine men's morrice is filled up with mud . . .
From our debate, from our dissension."

—SHAKESPEARE

I

FAIRIES, come back! We have not seen
Your dusky foot-prints on the green
This many a year. No frolic now
Shakes the dew from the hawthorn-bough.
Never a man and never a maid
Spies you in the blue-bell shade;
Yet, where the nine men's morrice stood,
Our spades are clearing out the mud.

Chorus.—Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

II

Fairies, come back! Our pomp of gold,
Our blazing noon, grows grey and old;
The scornful glittering ages wane:
Forgive, forget, come back again.
This is our England's Hallowe'en!
Come, trip it, trip it o'er the green,
Trip it, amidst the roaring mart,
In the still meadows of the heart.

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

III

Fairies, come back! Once more the gleams
Of your lost Eden haunt our dreams,
Where Evil, at the touch of Good,
Withers in the Enchanted Wood:
Fairies, come back! Drive gaunt Despair
And Famine to their ghoulish lair!
Tap at each heart's bright window-pane
Thro' merry England once again.

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

IV

Fairies, come back! And, if you bring
That long-expected song to sing,
Ciss needs not, ere she welcomes you,
To find a sixpence in her shoe!
If, of the mud he clears away,
Tom bears the ignoble stain to-day,
Come back, and he will not forget
The heavens that yearn beyond us yet.

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

V

Yet, if for this you will not come,
Your friends, the children, call you home,
Fairies, they wear no May-day crowns,
Your playmates in those grim black towns
Look, fairies, how they peak and pine,
How hungrily their great eyes shine!
From fevered alley and fœtid lane
Plead the thin arms—*Come back again!*

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

VI

We have named the stars and weighed the moon,
Counted our gains and . . . lost the boon,
If *this* be the end of all our lore—
To draw the blind and close the door!
O, lift the latch, slip in between
The things which we have heard and seen,
Slip thro' the fringes of the blind
Into the souls of all mankind.

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

VII

Fairies, come back! Our wisdom dies
Beneath your deeper, starrier skies!
We have reined the lightning, probed the flower:
Bless, as of old, our twilight hour!
Bring dreams, and let the dreams be true,
Bring hope that makes each heart anew,
Bring love that knits all hearts in one;
Then—sing of heaven and bring the sun!

Come, little irised heralds, fling
Earth's Eden-gates apart, and sing
The bright eyes and the cordial hand
Of brotherhood thro' all our land.

CREATION

In the beginning, there was nought
But heaven, one Majesty of Light,
Beyond all speech, beyond all thought,
Beyond all depth, beyond all height,
Consummate heaven, the first and last,
Enfolding in its perfect prime
No future rushing to the past,
But one rapt Now, that knew not Space or Time.

Formless it was, being gold on gold,
And void—but with that complete Life
Where music could no wings unfold
Till lo, God smote the strings of strife!
"Myself unto Myself am Throne,
Myself unto Myself am Thrall
I that am All am all alone,"
He said, "Yea, I have nothing, having all."

And, gathering round His mount of bliss
The angel-squadrons of His will,
He said, "One battle yet there is
To win, one vision to fulfil!
Since heaven where'er I gaze expands,
And power that knows no strife or cry,
Weakness shall bind and pierce My hands
And make a world for Me wherein to die.

"All might, all vastness and all glory
Being Mine, I must descend and make
Out of My heart a song, a story
Of little hearts that burn and break;
Out of My passion without end
I will make little azure seas,
And into small sad fields descend
And make green grass, white daisies, rustling trees."

Then shrank His angels, knowing He thrust
His arms out East and West and gave
For every little dream of dust
Part of His life as to a grave!

"*Enough, O Father, for Thy words*
Have pierced Thy hands!" But, low and sweet,
He said "Sunsets and streams and birds,
And drifting clouds!"—The purple stained His feet.—

"Enough!" His angels moaned in fear,
"*Father, Thy words have pierced Thy side!*"
He whispered, "Roses shall grow there,
And there must be a hawthorn-tide,
And ferns, dewy at dawn," and still
They moaned—"*Enough, the red drops bleed!*"
"And," sweet and low, "on every hill,"
He said, "I will have flocks and lambs to lead."

His angels bowed their heads beneath
Their wings till that great pang was gone:
"*Pour not Thy soul out unto Death!*"
They moaned, and still His Love flowed on,
"There shall be small white wings to stray
From bliss to bliss, from bloom to bloom,
And blue flowers in the wheat; and—" "*Stay!*
Speak not," they cried, "*the word that seals Thy tomb!*"

He spake—"I have thought of a little child
That I will have there to embark
On small adventures in the wild,
And front slight perils in the dark;
And I will hide from him and lure
His laughing eyes with suns and moons,
And rainbows that shall not endure;
And—when he is weary, sing him drowsy tunes."

His angels fell before Him weeping
"*Enough! Tempt not the Gates of Hell!*"
He said, "His soul is in his keeping
That we may love each other well,
And lest the dark too much affright him,
I will strow countless little stars
Across his childish skies to light him
That he may wage in peace his mimic wars;

"And oft forget Me as he plays
With swords and childish merchandize,
Or with his elfin balance weighs,
Or with his foot-rule metes, the skies;
Or builds his castles by the deep,
Or tunnels through the rocks, and then—
Turn to Me as he falls asleep,
And, in his dreams, feel for My hand again.

"And when he is older he shall be
My friend and walk here at My side;
Or—when he wills—grow young with Me,
And, to that happy world where once we died
Descending through the calm blue weather,
Buy life once more with our immortal breath,
And wander through the little fields together,
And taste of Love and Death."

THE PEACEMAKER.

Silently over his vast imperial seas,
Over his sentinel fleets the Shadow swept
And all his armies slept.
There was but one quick challenge at the gate,
Then—the cold menace of that out-stretched hand,
Waving aside the panoplies of State,
Brought the last faithful watchers to their knees,
And lightning flashed the grief from land to land.

Mourn, Britain, mourn, not for a king alone!
This was the people's king! His purple throne
Was in their hearts. They shared it. Millions of swords
Could not have shaken it! Sharers of this doom,
This democratic doom which all men know,
His Common-weal, in this great common woe,
Veiling its head in the universal gloom,
With that majestic grief which knows not words,
Bows o'er a world-wide tomb.

Mourn, Europe, for our England set this Crown
  In splendour past the reach of temporal power,
  Secure above the thunders of the hour,
A sun in the great skies of her renown,
  A sun to hold her wheeling worlds in one
By its own course of duty pre-ordained,
  Where'er the meteors flash and fall, a sun
With its great course of duty!

So he reigned,
  And died in its observance. Mightier he
Than any despot, in his people's love,
He served that law which rules the Thrones above,
  That world-wide law which by the raging sea
Abased the flatterers of Canúte and makes
  The King that abnegates all lesser power
  A rock in time of trouble, and a tower
Of strength where'er the tidal tempest breaks;
  That world-wide law whose name is harmony,
Whose service perfect freedom!

And *his* name
The Peacemaker, through all the future years
Shall burn, a glorious and prophetic flame,
A beaconing sun that never shall go down,
  A sun to speed the world's diviner morrow,
  A sun that shines the brighter for our sorrow;
For, O, what splendour in a monarch's crown
  Vies with the splendour of his people's tears?

And now, O now, while the sorrowful trumpet is blown,
From island to continent, zone to imperial zone,
And the flags of the nations are lowered in grief with our own;
Now, while the roll of the drums that for battle were dumb
When he reigned, salute his passing; and low on the breeze
From the snow-bound North to the Australasian seas
Surges the solemn lament—O, shall it not come,
A glimpse of that mightier union of all mankind?
Now, though our eyes, as they gaze on the vision, grow blind,
Now, while the world is all one funeral knell,
And the mournful cannon thunder his great farewell,

Now, while the bells of a thousand cities toll,
Remember, O England, remember the ageless goal,
Rally the slumbering faith in the depths of thy soul,
Lift up thine eyes to the Kingdom for which he fought,
That Empire of Peace and Good-will, for which to his death-
hour he wrought.
Then, then while the pomp of the world seems a little thing,
Ay, though by the world it be said,
The King is dead!
We shall lift up our hearts and answer—*Long live the King!*

THE SAILOR-KING

The fleet, the fleet puts out to sea
In a thunder of blinding foam to-night,
With a bursting wreck-strewn reef to lee,
But—a seaman fired yon beacon-light!
Seamen hailing a seaman, know—
Free-men crowning a free-man, sing—
The worth of that light where the great ships go,
The signal-fire of the king.

Cloud and wind may shift and veer:
This is steady and this is sure,
A signal over our hope and fear,
A pledge of the strength that shall endure—
Having no part in our storm-tossed strife—
A sign of union, which shall bring
Knowledge to men of their close-knit life,
The signal-fire of the king.

His friends are the old grey glorious waves,
The wide world round, the wide world round,
That have roared with our guns and covered our graves
From Nombre Dios to Plymouth Sound;
And his crown shall shine, a central sun
Round which the planet-nations sing,
Going their ways, but linked in one,
As the ships of our sailor-king.

Many the ships, but a single fleet;
  Many the roads, but a single goal;
And a light, a light where all roads meet,
  The beacon-fire of an Empire's soul;
The worth of that light his seamen know,
  Through all the deaths that the storm can bring
The crown of their comrade-ship a-glow,
  The signal-fire of the king.

THE FIDDLER'S FAREWELL

With my fiddle to my shoulder,
  And my hair turning grey,
And my heart growing older
  I must shuffle on my way!
Tho' there's not a hearth to greet me
  I must reap as I sowed,
And—the sunset shall meet me
  At the turn of the road.

O, the whin's a dusky yellow
  And the road a rosy white,
And the blackbird's call is mellow
  At the falling of night;
And there's honey in the heather
  Where we'll make our last abode,
My tunes and me together
  At the turn of the road.

I have fiddled for your city
  Thro' market-place and inn!
I have poured forth my pity
  On your sorrow and your sin!
But your riches are your burden,
  And your pleasure is your goad!
I've the whin-gold for guerdon
  At the turn of the road.

Your village-lights 'll call me
  As the lights of home the dead;
But a black night befall me
  Ere your pillows rest my head!
God be praised, tho' like a jewel
  Every cottage casement showed,
There's a star that's not so cruel
  At the turn of the road.

Nay, beautiful and kindly
  Are the faces drawing nigh,
But I gaze on them blindly
  And hasten, hasten by;
For O, no face of wonder
  On earth has ever glowed
Like the One that waits me yonder
  At the turn of the road.

Her face is lit with splendour,
  She dwells beyond the skies;
But deep, deep and tender
  Are the tears in her eyes:
The angels see them glistening
  In pity for my load,
And—she's waiting there, she's listening,
  At the turn of the road.

TO A PESSIMIST

Life like a cruel mistress woos
  The passionate heart of man, you say,
Only in mockery to refuse
  His love, at last, and turn away.

To me she seems a queen that knows
  How great is love—but ah, how rare!—
And, pointing heavenward ere she goes,
  Gives him the rose from out her hair.

MOUNT IDA

[This poem commemorates an event of some years ago, when a young Englishman—still remembered by many of his contemporaries at Oxford—went up into Mount Ida and was never seen again.]

I

Not cypress, but this warm pine-plumage now
  Fragrant with sap, I pluck; nor bid you weep,
Ye Muses that still haunt the heavenly brow
  Of Ida, though the ascent is hard and steep:
Weep not for him who left us wrapped in sleep
  At dawn beneath the holy mountain's breast
    And all alone from Ilion's gleaming shore
Clomb the high sea-ward glens, fain to drink deep
  Of earth's old glory from your silent crest,
      Take the cloud-conquering throne
      Of gods, and gaze alone
Thro' heaven. Darkling we slept who saw his face no more.

II

Ah yet, in him hath Lycidas a brother,
  And Adonaïs will not say him nay,
And Thyrsis to the breast of one sweet Mother
  Welcomes him, climbing by the self-same way:
Quietly as a cloud at break of day
  Up the long glens of golden dew he stole
    (And surely Bion called to him afar!)
The tearful hyacinths, and the greenwood spray
  Clinging to keep him from the sapphire goal,
      Kept of his path no trace!
      Upward the yearning face
Clomb the ethereal height, calm as the morning star.

III

Ah yet, incline, dear Sisters, or my song
  That with the light wings of the skimming swallow
Must range the reedy slopes, will work him wrong!
  And with some golden shaft do thou, Apollo,
Show the pine-shadowed path that none may follow:

For, as the blue air shuts behind a bird,
Round him closed Ida's cloudy woods and rills!
Day-long, night-long, by echoing height and hollow,
We called him, but our tumult died unheard:
Down from the scornful sky
Our faint wing-broken cry
Fluttered and perished among the many-folded hills.

IV

Ay, though we clomb each faint-flushed peak of vision,
Nought but our own sad faces we divined:
Thy radiant way still laughed us to derision,
And still revengeful Echo proved unkind;
And oft our faithless hearts half feared to find
Thy cold corse in some dark mist-drenched ravine
Where the white foam flashed headlong to the sea:
How should we find thee, spirits deaf and blind
Even to the things which we had heard and seen?
Eyes that could see no more
The old light on sea and shore,
What should they hope or fear to find? They found not thee;

V

For thou wast ever alien to our skies,
A wistful stray of radiance on this earth,
A changeling with deep memories in thine eyes
Mistily gazing thro' our loud-voiced mirth
To some fair land beyond the gates of birth;
Yet as a star thro' clouds, thou still didst shed
Through our dark world thy lovelier, rarer glow;
Time, like a picture of but little worth,
Before thy young hand lifelessly outspread,
At one light stroke from thee
Gleamed with Eternity;
Thou gav'st the master's touch, and we—we did not know.

VI

Not though we gazed from heaven o'er Ilion
  Dreaming on earth below, mistily crowned
With towering memories, and beyond her shone
  The wine-dark seas Achilles heard resound!
Only, and after many days, we found
  Dabbled with dew, at border of a wood
    Bedded in hyacinths, open and a-glow
Thy Homer's Iliad. . . . Dryad tears had drowned
  The rough Greek type and, as with honey or blood,
    One crocus with crushed gold
      Stained the great page that told
Of gods that sighed their loves on Ida, long ago.

VII

See—*for a couch to their ambrosial limbs*
  Even as their golden load of splendour presses
The fragrant thyme, a billowing cloud up-swims
  Of springing flowers beneath their deep caresses,
Hyacinth, lotus, crocus, wildernesses
  Of bloom . . . but clouds of sunlight and of dew
    Dropping rich balm, round the dark pine-woods curled
That the warm wonder of their in-woven tresses,
  And all the secret blisses that they knew,
    Where beauty kisses truth
      In heaven's deep heart of youth,
Might still be hidden, as thou art, from the heartless world.

VIII

Even as we found thy book, below these rocks
  Perchance that strange great eagle's feather lay,
When Ganymede, from feeding of his flocks
  On Ida, vanished thro' the morning grey:
Stranger it seemed, if thou couldst cast away

Those golden musics as a thing of nought,
A dream for which no longer thou hadst need!
Ah, was it here then that the break of day
Brought thee the substance for the shadow, taught
Thy soul a swifter road
To ease it of its load
And watch this world of shadows as a dream recede?

IX

We slept! Darkling we slept! Our busy schemes,
Our cold mechanic world awhile was still;
But O, their eyes are blinded even in dreams
Who from the heavenlier Powers withdraw their will:
Here did the dawn with purer light fulfil
Thy happier eyes than ours, here didst thou see
The quivering wonder-light in flower and dew,
The quickening glory of the haunted hill,
The Hamadryad beckoning from the tree.
The Naiad from the stream;
While from her long dark dream
Earth woke, trembling with life, light, beauty, through and through.

X

And the everlasting miracle of things
Flowed round thee, and this dark earth opposed no bar,
And radiant faces from the flowers and springs
Dawned on thee, whispering, *Knowest thou whence* we *are?*
Faintly thou heardst us calling thee afar
As Hylas heard, swooning beneath the wave,
Girdled with glowing arms, while wood and glen
Echoed his name beneath that rosy star;
And thy farewell came faint as from the grave
For very bliss; but we
Could neither hear nor see;
And all the hill with *Hylas! Hylas!* rang again.

XI

But there were deeper love-tales for thine ears
Than mellow-tongued Theocritus could tell:
Over him like a sea two thousand years
Had swept. They solemnized his music well!
Farewell! What word could answer but farewell,
From thee, O happy spirit, that couldst steal
So quietly from this world at break of day?
What voice of ours could break the silent spell
Beauty had cast upon thee, or reveal
The gates of sun and dew
Which oped and let thee through
And led thee heavenward by that deep enchanted way?

XII

Yet here thou mad'st thy choice: Love, Wisdom, Power,
As once before young Paris, they stood here!
Beneath them Ida, like one full-blown flower,
Shed her bloom earthward thro' the radiant air
Leaving her rounded fruit, their beauty, bare
To the everlasting dawn; and, in thy palm
The golden apple of the Hesperian isle
Which thou must only yield to the Most Fair;
But not to Juno's great luxurious calm,
Nor Dian's curved white moon,
Gav'st thou the sunset's boon,
Nor to foam-bosomed Aphrodite's rose-lipped smile.

XIII

Here didst thou make the eternal choice aright,
Here, in this hallowed haunt of nymph and faun,
They stood before thee in that great new light,
The three great splendours of the immortal dawn,
With all the cloudy veils of Time withdrawn

Or only glistening round the firm white snows
Of their pure beauty like the golden dew
Brushed from the feathery ferns below the lawn;
But not to cold Diana's morning rose,
Nor to great Juno's frown
Cast thou the apple down,
And, when the Paphian raised her lustrous eyes anew,

XIV

Thou from thy soul didst whisper—*in that heaven*
Which yearns beyond us! Lead me up the height!
How should the golden fruit to one be given
Till your three splendours in that Sun unite
Where each in each ye move like light in light?
How should I judge the rapture till I know
The pain? And like three waves of music there
They closed thee round, blinding thy blissful sight
With beauty and, like one roseate orb a-glow,
They bore thee on their breasts
Up the sun-smitten crests
And melted with thee smiling into the Most Fair.

XV

Upward and onward, ever as ye went
The cities of the world nestled beneath
Closer, as if in love, round Ida, blent
With alien hills in one great bridal-wreath
Of dawn-flushed clouds; while, breathing with your breath
New heavens mixed with your mounting bliss. Deep eyes,
Beautiful eyes, imbrued with the world's tears
Dawned on you, beautiful gleams of Love and Death
Flowed thro' your questioning with divine replies
From that ineffable height
Dark with excess of light
Where the Ever-living dies and the All-loving hears.

XVI

For thou hadst seen what tears upon man's face
  Bled from the heart or burned from out the brain,
And not denied or cursed, but couldst embrace
  Infinite sweetness in the heart of pain,
And heardst those universal choirs again
  Wherein like waves of one harmonious sea
    All our slight dreams of heaven are singing still,
And still the throned Olympians swell the strain,
  And, hark, the burden of all—*Come unto Me!*
      Sky into deepening sky
      Melts with that one great cry;
And the lost doves of Ida moan on Siloa's hill.

XVII

I gather all the ages in my song
  And send them singing up the heights to thee!
Chord by æonian chord the stars prolong
  Their passionate echoes to Eternity:
Earth wakes, and one orchestral symphony
  Sweeps o'er the quivering harp-strings of mankind;
    Grief modulates into heaven, hate drowns in love,
No strife now but of love in that great sea
  Of song! I dream! I dream! Mine eyes grow blind:
      Chords that I not command
      Escape the fainting hand;
Tears fall. Thou canst not hear. Thou'rt still too far above.

XVIII

Farewell! What word should answer but farewell
  From thee, O happy spirit, whose clear gaze
Discerned the path—clear, but unsearchable—
  Where Olivet sweetens, deepens, Ida's praise,
The path that strikes as thro' a sunlit haze

Through Time to that clear reconciling height
Where our commingling gleams of godhead dwell;
Strikes thro' the turmoil of our darkling days
To that great harmony where, like light in light,
Wisdom and Beauty still
Haunt the thrice-holy hill,
And Love, immortal Love . . . what answer but farewell?

THE ELECTRIC TRAM

I

Bluff and burly and splendid
Thro' roaring traffic-tides,
By secret lightnings attended
The land-ship hisses and glides.
And I sit on its bridge and I watch and I dream
While the world goes gallantly by,
With all its crowded houses and its colored shops a-stream
Under the June-blue sky,
Heigh, ho!
Under the June-blue sky.

II

There's a loafer at the kerb with a sulphur-coloured pile
Of "Lights! Lights! Lights!" to sell;
And a flower-girl there with some lilies and a smile
By the gilt swing-doors of a drinking hell,
Where the money is rattling loud and fast,
And I catch one glimpse as the ship swings past
Of a woman with a babe at her breast
Wrapped in a ragged shawl;
She is drinking away with the rest,
And the sun shines over it all,
Heigh, ho!
The sun shines over it all!

III

And a barrel-organ is playing,
Somewhere, far away,
Abide with me, and *The world is gone a-maying*,
And *What will the policeman say?*
There's a glimpse of the river down an alley by a church,
And the barges with their tawny-coloured sails,
And a grim and grimy coal-wharf where the London pigeons perch
And flutter and spread their tails,
Heigh, ho!
Flutter and spread their tails.

IV

O, what does it mean, all the pageant and the pity,
The waste and the wonder and the shame?
I am riding tow'rds the sunset thro' the vision of a City
Which we cloak with the stupor of a name!
I am riding thro' ten thousand thousand tragedies and terrors,
Ten million heavens that save and hells that damn;
And the lightning draws my car tow'rds the golden evening star;
And—They call it only "riding on a tram,"
Heigh, ho!
They call it only "riding on a tram."

SHERWOOD

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA

ROBIN	Earl of Huntingdon, known as "Robin Hood."
LITTLE JOHN	Outlaws and followers of "Robin Hood."
FRIAR TUCK	
WILL SCARLET . . .	
REYNOLD GREENLEAF .	
MUCH, THE MILLER'S SON	
ALLAN-A-DALE . . .	

PRINCE JOHN.	
KING RICHARD, Cœur de Lion.	
BLONDEL	King Richard's minstrel.
OBERON	King of the Fairies.
TITANIA	Queen of the Fairies.
PUCK	A Fairy.
THE SHERIFF OF NOTTINGHAM.	
FITZWALTER	Father of Marian, known as "Maid Marian."
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF . .	A Fool.
ARTHUR PLANTAGENET .	Nephew to Prince John, a boy of about ten years of age.
QUEEN ELINOR . . .	Mother of Prince John and Richard Lion-Heart.
MARIAN FITZWALTER .	Known as Maid Marian, betrothed to Robin Hood.
JENNY	Maid to Marian.
WIDOW SCARLET . . .	Mother of Will Scarlet.
PRIORESS OF KIRKLEE.	

Fairies, merry men, serfs, peasants, mercenaries, an abbot, a baron, a novice, nuns, courtiers, soldiers, retainers, etc.

ACT I

SCENE I. *Night. The borders of the forest. The smouldering embers of a Saxon homestead. The* SHERIFF *and his men are struggling with a* SERF.

SERF

No, no, not that! not that! If you should blind me
God will repay you. Kill me out of hand!

[*Enter* PRINCE JOHN *and several of his retainers.*]

JOHN

Who is this night-jar?

[*The retainers laugh.*]

Surely, master Sheriff,
You should have cut its tongue out, first. Its cries
Tingle so hideously across the wood
They'll wake the King in Palestine. Small wonder
That Robin Hood evades you.

SHERIFF

[*To the* SERF.]

Silence, dog,
Know you not better than to make this clamour
Before Prince John?

SERF

Prince John! It is Prince John!
For God's love save me, sir!

JOHN

Whose thrall is he?

SHERIFF

I know not, sir, but he was caught red-handed
Killing the king's deer. By the forest law
He should of rights be blinded; for, as you see,
[*He indicates the* SERF'S *right hand.*]
'Tis not his first deer at King Richard's cost.

JOHN

'Twill save you trouble if you say at mine.

SHERIFF

Ay, sir, I pray your pardon—at *your* cost!
His right hand lacks the thumb and arrow-finger,
And though he vows it was a falling tree
That crushed them, you may trust your Sheriff, sir,
It was the law that clipped them when he last
Hunted your deer.

SERF

Prince, when the Conqueror came,
They burned my father's homestead with the rest
To make the King a broader hunting-ground.
I have hunted there for food. How could I bear
To hear my hungry children crying? Prince,
They'll make good bowmen for your wars, one day.

JOHN

He is much too fond of 'Prince': he'll never live
To see a king. Whose thrall?—his iron collar,
Look, is the name not on it?

SHERIFF

Sir, the name
Is filed away, and in another hour
The ring would have been broken. He is one of those
Green adders of the moon, night-creeping thieves
Whom Huntingdon has tempted to the woods.
These desperate ruffians flee their lawful masters
And flock around the disaffected Earl
Like ragged rooks around an elm, by scores!
And now, i' faith, the sun of Huntingdon
Is setting fast. They've well nigh beggared him,
Eaten him out of house and home. They say
That, when we make him outlaw, we shall find
Nought to distrain upon, but empty cupboards.

JOHN

Did you not serve him once yourself?

SHERIFF

Oh, ay,
He was more prosperous then. But now my cupboards
Are full, and his are bare. Well, I'd think scorn
To share a crust with outcast churls and thieves,
Doffing his dignity, letting them call him
Robin, or Robin Hood, as if an Earl
Were just a plain man, which he will be soon,

When we have served our writ of outlawry!
'Tis said he hopes much from the King's return
And swears by Lion-Heart; and though King Richard
Is brother to yourself, 'tis all the more
Ungracious, sir, to hope he should return,
And overset your rule. But then—to keep
Such base communications! Myself would think it
Unworthy of my sheriffship, much more
Unworthy a right Earl.

JOHN

You talk too much!
This whippet, here, slinks at his heel, you say.
Mercy may close her eyes, then. Take him off,
Blind him or what you will; and let him thank
His master for it. But wait—perhaps he knows
Where we may trap this young patrician thief.
Where is your master?

SERF

Where you'll never find him.

JOHN

Oh, ho! the dog is faithful! Take him away.
Get your red business done. I shall require
Your men to ride with me.

SHERIFF

[*To his men.*]

Take him out yonder,
A bow-shot into the wood, so that his clamour
Do not offend my lord. Delay no time,
The irons are hot by this. They'll give you light
Enough to blind him by.

SERF

[*Crying out and struggling as he is forced back into the forest.*]
No, no, not that!
God will repay you! Kill me out of hand!

SHERIFF

[*To* PRINCE JOHN.]

There is a kind of justice in all this.
The irons being heated in that fire, my lord,
Which was his hut, aforetime.
[*Some of the men take the glowing irons from the fire and follow into the wood.*]

There's no need
To parley with him, either. The snares are laid
For Robin Hood. He goes this very night
To his betrothal feast.

JOHN

Betrothal feast!

SHERIFF

At old Fitzwalter's castle, sir.

JOHN

Ha! ha!
There will be one more guest there than he thought!
Ourselves are riding thither. We intended
My Lady Marian for a happier fate
Than bride to Robin Hood. Your plans are laid
To capture him?

SHERIFF

[*Consequentially.*]

It was our purpose, sir,
To serve the writ of outlawry upon him
And capture him as he came forth.

JOHN

That's well.
Then—let him disappear—you understand?

SHERIFF

I have your warrant, sir? Death? A great Earl?

JOHN

Why, first declare him outlawed at his feast!
'Twill gladden the tremulous heart of old Fitzwalter
With his prospective son-in-law; and then—
No man will overmuch concern himself
Whither an outlaw goes. You understand?

SHERIFF

It shall be done, sir.

JOHN

But the Lady Marian!
By heaven, I'll take her. I'll banish old Fitzwalter
If he prevent my will in this. You'll bring
How many men to ring the castle round?

SHERIFF

A good five score of bowmen.

JOHN

Then I'll take her
This very night as hostage for Fitzwalter,
Since he consorts with outlaws. These grey rats
Will gnaw my kingdom's heart out. For 'tis mine,
This England, now or later. They that hold
By Richard, as their absent king, would make
My rule a usurpation. God, am I
My brother's keeper?
[*There is a cry in the forest from the* SERF, *who immediately afterwards appears at the edge of the glade, shaking himself free from his guards. He seizes a weapon and rushes at* PRINCE JOHN. *One of the retainers runs him through and he falls at the* PRINCE'S *feet.*]

JOHN

That's a happy answer!

SHERIFF

[*Stooping over the body.*]

He is dead.

JOHN

I am sorry. It were better sport
To send him groping like a hoodman blind
Through Sherwood, whimpering for his Robin. Come,
I'll ride with you to this betrothal feast.
Now for my Lady Marian!
[*Exeunt all. A pause. The scene darkens. Shadowy figures creep out from the thickets, of old men, women and children.*]

FIRST OLD MAN

[*Stretching his arms up to Heaven.*]

God, am I
My brother's keeper? Witness, God in heaven,
He said it and not we—Cain's word, he said it!

FIRST WOMAN

[*Kneeling by the body.*]

O Father, Father, and the blood of Abel
Cries to thee!

A BLIND MAN

Is there any light here still?
I feel a hot breath on my face. The dark
Is better for us all. I am sometimes glad
They blinded me those many years ago.
Princes are princes; and God made the world
For one or two it seems. Well, I am glad
I cannot see His world.

FIRST WOMAN

[*Still by the body and whispering to the others.*]

Keep him away.
'Tis as we thought. The dead man is his son.
Keep him away, poor soul. He need not know.
[*Some of the men carry the body among the thickets.*]

A CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry, I'm hungry!

FIRST OLD MAN

There's no food
For any of us to-night. The snares are empty,
And I can try no more.

THE BLIND MAN

Wait till my son
Comes back. He's a rare hunter is my boy.
You need not fret, poor little one. My son
Is much too quick and clever for the Sheriff.
He'll bring you something good. Why, ha! ha! ha!
Friends, I've a thought—the Sheriff's lit the fire
Ready for us to roast our meat. Come, come,
Let us be merry while we may! My boy
Will soon come back with food for the old folks.
The fire burns brightly, eh?

SECOND OLD MAN

The fire that feeds
On hope and eats our hearts away. They've burnt
Everything, everything!

THE BLIND MAN

Ah, princes are princes!
But when the King comes home from the Crusade,
We shall have better times.

FIRST OLD MAN

Ay, when the King
Comes home from the Crusade.

CHILD

Mother, I'm hungry.

SECOND WOMAN

Oh, but if I could only find a crust
Left by the dogs. Masters, the child will starve.
We must have food.

THE BLIND MAN

I tell you when my boy
Comes back, we shall have plenty!

FIRST WOMAN

God pity thee!

THE BLIND MAN

What dost thou mean?

SECOND WOMAN

Masters, the child will starve.

FIRST OLD MAN

Hist, who comes here—a forester?

THE BLIND MAN

We'd best
Slip back into the dark.

FIRST WOMAN

[*Excitedly.*]

No, stay! All's well.
There's Shadow-of-a-Leaf, good Lady Marian's fool
Beside him!

THE BLIND MAN

Ah, they say there's fairy blood
In Shadow-of-a-Leaf. But I've no hopes of more
From him, than wild bees' honey-bags.

[*Enter* LITTLE JOHN, *a giant figure, leading a donkey, laden with a sack. On the other side,* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *trips, a slender figure in green trunk-hose and doublet. He is tickling the donkey's ears with a long fern.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Gee! Whoa!
Neddy, my boy, have you forgot the Weaver,
And how Titania tickled your long ears?
Ha! ha! Don't ferns remind you?

LITTLE JOHN

Friends, my master
Hath sent me to you, fearing ye might hunger.

FIRST OLD MAN

Thy master?

LITTLE JOHN

Robin Hood.

SECOND WOMAN

[*Falling on her knees.*]

God bless his name.
God bless the kindly name of Robin Hood.

LITTLE JOHN

[*Giving them food.*]

'Tis well nigh all that's left him; and to-night
He goes to his betrothal feast.

[*All the outcasts except the first old man exeunt.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Pointing to the donkey.*]

Now look,
There's nothing but that shadow of a cross
On his grey back to tell you of the palms
That once were strewn before my Lord, the King.
Won't ferns, won't branching ferns, do just as well?
There's only a dream to ride my donkey now!
But, Neddy, I'll lead you home and cry—HOSANNA!
We'll thread the glad Gate Beautiful again,
Though now there's only a Fool to hold your bridle
And only moonlit ferns to strew your path,
And the great King is fighting for a grave
In lands beyond the sea. Come, Neddy, come,
Hosanna!

[*Exit* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *with the donkey. He strews ferns before it as he goes.*]

FIRST OLD MAN

'Tis a strange creature, master! Thinkest
There's fairy blood in him?

LITTLE JOHN

'Twas he that brought
Word of your plight to Robin Hood. He flits
Like Moonshine thro' the forest. He'll be home
Before I know it. I must be hastening back.
This makes a sad betrothal night.

FIRST OLD MAN

That minds me,
Couched in the thicket yonder, we overheard
The Sheriff tell Prince John . . .

LITTLE JOHN

Prince John!

FIRST OLD MAN

You'd best
Warn Robin Hood. They're laying a trap for him.
Ay! Now I mind me of it! I heard 'em say
They'd take him at the castle.

LITTLE JOHN

To-night?

FIRST OLD MAN

To-night!
Fly, lad, for God's dear love. Warn Robin Hood!
Fly like the wind, or you'll be there too late.
And yet you'd best be careful. There's five score
In ambush round the castle.

LITTLE JOHN

I'll be there
An if I have to break five hundred heads!
[*He rushes off thro' the forest. The old man goes into the thicket after the others. The scene darkens. A soft light, as*

of the moon, appears between the ferns to the right of the glade, showing OBERON *and* TITANIA.]

TITANIA

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.

OBERON

Last night the gates were shut, and I heard weeping!
Men, women, children, beat upon the gates
That guard our happy world. They could not sleep.
Titania, must not that be terrible,
When mortals cannot sleep?

TITANIA

Yet one night more
Dear Robin Hood has opened the gates wide
And their poor weary souls can enter in.

OBERON

Yet one night more we woodland elves may steal
Out thro' the gates. I fear the time will come
When they must close for ever; and we no more
Shall hold our Sherwood revels.

TITANIA

Only love
And love's kind sacrifice can open them.
For when a mortal hurts himself to help
Another, then he thrusts the gates wide open
Between his world and ours.

OBERON

Ay, but that's rare,
That kind of love, Titania, for the gates
Are almost always closed.

TITANIA

Yet one night more!
Hark, how the fairy host begins to sing
Within the gates. Wait here and we shall see
What weary souls by grace of Robin Hood
This night shall enter Dreamland. See, they come!

[*The soft light deepens in the hollow among the ferns and the ivory gates of Dreamland are seen swinging open. The fairy host is heard, singing to invite the mortals to enter.*]

[*Song of the fairies.*]

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
Your world is growing old;
But a Princess sleeps in the greenwood,
Whose hair is brighter than gold.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
O hearts that bleed and burn,
Her lips are redder than roses,
Who sleeps in the faëry fern.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
By the Beauty that wakes anew
Milk-white with the fragrant hawthorn
In the drip of the dawn-red dew.

The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer! The Forest shall conquer!
O hearts that are weary of pain,
Come back to your home in Faërie
And wait till she wakes again.

[*The victims of the forest-laws steal out of the thicket once more—dark, distorted, lame, blind, serfs with iron collars round their necks, old men, women and children; and as the fairy song breaks into chorus they pass in procession thro' the beautiful gates. The gates slowly close. The fairy song is heard as dying away in the distance.*]

TITANIA

[*Coming out into the glade and holding up her hands to the evening star beyond the tree-tops.*]
Shine, shine, dear star of Love, yet one night more.

SCENE II. *A banqueting hall in* FITZWALTER'S *castle. The guests are assembling for the betrothal feast of* ROBIN *and* MARIAN. *Some of* ROBIN HOOD'S *men, clad in Lincoln green, are just arriving at the doors.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *runs forward to greet them.*

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come in, my scraps of Lincoln green; come in,
My slips of greenwood. You're much wanted here!
Head, heart and eyes, we are all pent up in walls
Of stone—nothing but walls on every side—
And not a rose to break them—big blind walls,
Neat smooth stone walls! Come in, my ragged robins;
Come in, my jolly minions of the moon,
My straggling hazel-boughs! Hey, bully friar,
Come in, my knotted oak! Ho, little Much,
Come in, my sweet green linnet. Come, my cushats,
Larks, yellow-hammers, fern-owls, Oh, come in,
Come in, my Dian's foresters, and drown us
With may, with blossoming may!

FITZWALTER

Out, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!
Welcome, welcome, good friends of Huntingdon,
Or Robin Hood, by whatsoever name
You best may love him.

CRIES

Robin! Robin! Robin!
[*Enter* ROBIN HOOD.]

FITZWALTER

Robin, so be it! Myself I am right glad
To call him at this bright betrothal feast
My son.

[*Lays a hand on* ROBIN'S *shoulder.*]

Yet, though I would not cast a cloud
Across our happy gathering, you'll forgive
An old man and a father if he sees
All your glad faces thro' a summer mist
Of sadness.

ROBIN

Sadness? Yes, I understand.

FITZWALTER

No, Robin, no, you cannot understand.

ROBIN

Where's Marian?

FITZWALTER

Ay, that's all you think of, boy.
But I must say a word to all of you
Before she comes.

ROBIN

Why—what? . . .

FITZWALTER

No need to look
So startled; but it is no secret here;
For many of you are sharers of his wild
Adventures. Now I hoped an end had come
To these, until another rumour reached me,
This very day, of yet another prank.
You know, you know, how perilous a road
My Marian must ride if Huntingdon
Tramples the forest-laws beneath his heel
And, in the thin disguise of Robin Hood,

Succours the Saxon outlaws, makes his house
A refuge for them, lavishes his wealth
To feed their sick and needy.

[*The* SHERIFF *and two of his men appear in the great doorway out of sight of the guests.*]

SHERIFF

[*Whispering.*]

Not yet! keep back!
One of you go—see that the guards are set!
He must not slip us.

FITZWALTER

Oh, I know his heart
Is gold, but this is not an age of gold;
And those who have must keep, or lose the power
Even to help themselves. No—he must doff
His green disguise of Robin Hood for ever,
And wear his natural coat of Huntingdon.

ROBIN

Ah, which is the disguise? Day after day
We rise and put our social armour on,
A different mask for every friend; but steel
Always to case our hearts. We are all so wrapped,
So swathed, so muffled in habitual thought
That now I swear we do not know our souls
Or bodies from their winding-sheets; but Custom,
Custom, the great god Custom, all day long
Shovels the dirt upon us where we lie
Buried alive and dreaming that we stand
Upright and royal. Sir, I have great doubts
About this world, doubts if we have the right
To sit down here for this betrothal feast
And gorge ourselves with plenty, when we know
That for the scraps and crumbs which we let fall
And never miss, children would kiss our hands
And women weep in gratitude. Suppose
A man fell wounded at your gates, you'd not

Pass on and smile and leave him there to die.
And can a few short miles of distance blind you?
Miles, nay, a furlong is enough to close
The gates of mercy. Must we thrust our hands
Into the wounds before we can believe?
Oh, is our sight so thick and gross? We came,
We saw, we conquered with the Conqueror.
We gave ourselves broad lands; and when our king
Desired a wider hunting ground we set
Hundreds of Saxon homes a-blaze and tossed
Women and children back into the fire
If they but wrung their hands against our will.
And so we made our forest, and its leaves
Were pitiful, more pitiful than man.
They gave our homeless victims the same refuge
And happy hiding place they give the birds
And foxes. Then we made our forest-laws,
And he that dared to hunt, even for food,
Even on the ground where we had burned his hut,
The ground we had drenched with his own kindred's blood,
Poor foolish churl, why, we put out his eyes
With red-hot irons, cut off both his hands,
Torture him with such horrors that . . . Christ God,
How can I help but fight against it all?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, gossips, if the Conqueror had but burned
Everything with four walls, hut, castle, palace,
And turned the whole wide world into a forest,
Drenched us with may, we might be happy then!
With sweet blue wood-smoke curling thro' the boughs,
And just a pigeon's flap to break the silence,
And ferns, of course, there's much to make men happy.
Well, well, the forest conquers at the last!
I saw a thistle in the castle courtyard,
A purple thistle breaking thro' the pavement,
Yesterday; and it's wonderful how soon
Some creepers pick these old grey walls to pieces.
These nunneries and these monasteries now,
They don't spring up like flowers, so I suppose
Old mother Nature wins the race at last.

FITZWALTER

Robin, my heart is with you, but I know
A hundred ages will not change this earth.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*With a candle in his hand.*]

Gossip, suppose the sun goes out like this.
Pouf!

[*Blows it out.*]

Stranger things have happened.

FITZWALTER

Silence, fool! . . .

So, if you share your wealth with all the world
Earth will be none the better, and my poor girl
Will suffer for it. Where you got the gold
You have already lavished on the poor
Heaven knows.

FRIAR TUCK

Oh, by the mass and the sweet moon
Of Sherwood, so do I? That's none so hard
A riddle!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, Friar Tuck, we know, we know!
Under the hawthorn bough, and at the foot
Of rainbows, that's where fairies hide their gold.
Cut me a silver penny out of the moon
Next time you're there.

[*Whispers.*]

Now tell me, have you brought
Your quarter-staff?

FRIAR TUCK

[*Whispering.*]

Hush! hush.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, mum's the word!
I see it!

FITZWALTER

Believe me, Robin, there's one way
And only one—patience! When Lion-Heart
Comes home from the Crusade, he will not brook
This blot upon our chivalry. Prince John
Is dangerous to a heart like yours. Beware
Of rousing him. Meanwhile, your troth holds good;
But, till the King comes home from the Crusade
You must not claim your bride.

ROBIN

So be it, then. . . .
When the great King comes home from the Crusade! . . .

FITZWALTER

Meanwhile for Marian's sake and mine, I pray
Do nothing rash.

[*Enter* WIDOW SCARLET. *She goes up to* ROBIN HOOD.]

WIDOW SCARLET

Are you that Robin Hood
They call the poor man's friend?

ROBIN

I am.

WIDOW SCARLET

They told me,
They told me I should find you here. They told me!

ROBIN

Come, mother, what's the trouble?

WIDOW SCARLET

Sir, my son
Will Scarlet lies in gaol at Nottingham
For killing deer in Sherwood! Sir, they'll hang him.
He only wanted food for him and me!
They'll kill him, I tell you, they'll kill him. I can't help
Crying it out. He's all I have, all! Save him!
I'll pray for you, I'll . . .

ROBIN

[*To* FITZWALTER, *as he raises* WIDOW SCARLET *gently to her feet.*]

Sir, has not the King
Come home from the Crusade? Does not your heart
Fling open wide its gates to welcome him?

FITZWALTER

Robin, you set me riddles. Follow your conscience.
Do what seems best.

ROBIN

I hope there is a way,
Mother. I knew Will Scarlet. Better heart
There never beat beneath a leather jerkin.
He loved the forest and the forest loves him;
And if the lads that wear the forest's livery
Of living green should happen to break out
And save Will Scarlet (as on my soul I swear,
Mother, they shall!) why, that's a matter none
Shall answer for to prince, or king, or God,
But you and Robin Hood; and if the judgment
Strike harder upon us than the heavenly smile
Of sunshine thro' the greenwood, may it fall
Upon my head alone.

[*Enter the* SHERIFF, *with two of his men.*]

SHERIFF

[*Reads.*]

In the King's name!

Thou, Earl of Huntingdon, by virtue of this writ art hereby attainted and deprived of thine earldom, thy lands and all thy goods and chattels whatsoever and whereas thou hast at divers times trespassed against the officers of the king by force of arms, thou art hereby outlawed and banished the realm.

ROBIN

That's well.

[*He laughs.*]

It puts an end to the great question
Of how I shall dispose my wealth, Fitzwalter.
But "banished"?—No! that is beyond their power
While I have power to breathe, unless they banish
The kind old oaks of Sherwood. They may call it
"Outlawed," perhaps.

FITZWALTER

Who let the villain in
Thro' doors of mine?

CRIES

Out with him! Out with him!

[*The guests draw swords and the* SHERIFF *retreats thro' the doorway with his men.*]

ROBIN

Stop!
Put up your swords! He had his work to do.

[WIDOW SCARLET *falls sobbing at his feet.*]

WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, who will save my son,
My son?

ROBIN

[*Raising her.*]

Why, mother, this is but a dream,
This poor fantastic strutting show of law!
And you shall wake with us in Sherwood Forest
And find Will Scarlet in your arms again.
Come, cheerly, cheerly, we shall overcome
All this. Hark!

[*A bugle sounds in the distance. There is a scuffle in the doorway and* LITTLE JOHN *bursts in with his head bleeding.*]

LITTLE JOHN

Master, master, come away!
They are setting a trap for thee, drawing their lines
All round the castle.

ROBIN

How now, Little John,
They have wounded thee! Art hurt?

LITTLE JOHN

No, no, that's nothing.
Only a bloody cockscomb. Come, be swift,
Or, if thou wert a fox, thou'dst never slip
Between 'em. Ah, hear that?

[*Another bugle sounds from another direction.*]

That's number two.
Two sides cut off already. When the third
Sounds—they will have thee, sure as eggs is eggs.
Prince John is there, Fitzwalter cannot save 'ee.
They'll burn the castle down.

ROBIN

Prince John is there?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, and my lord Fitzwalter had best look
Well to my mistress Marian, if these ears
Heard right as I came creeping thro' their lines.
Look well to her, my lord, look well to her.
Come, master, come, for God's sake, come away.

FITZWALTER

Robin, this is thy rashness. I warned thee, boy!
Prince John! Nay, that's too perilous a jest
For even a prince to play with me. Come, Robin,
You must away and quickly.

ROBIN

Let me have
One word with Marian.

LITTLE JOHN

It would be the last
On earth. Come, if you ever wish to see
Her face again.

FITZWALTER

Come, Robin, are you mad?
You'll bring us all to ruin!

[*He opens a little door in the wall.*]

The secret passage,
This brings you out by Much the Miller's wheel,
Thro' an otter's burrow in the river bank.
Come, quick, or you'll destroy us! Take this lanthorn.
If you're in danger, slip into the stream
And let it carry you down into the heart
Of Sherwood. Come now, quickly, you must go!

ROBIN

The old cave, lads, in Sherwood, you know where
To find me. Friar Tuck, bring Widow Scarlet
Thither to-morrow, with a word or two
From Lady Marian!

FITZWALTER

Quickly, quickly, go.

[*He pushes* ROBIN *and* LITTLE JOHN *into the opening and shuts the door. A pause.*]

Oh, I shall pay for this, this cursed folly!
Henceforth I swear I wash my hands of him!

[*Enter* MARIAN, *from a door on the right above the banqueting hall. She pauses, pale and frightened, on the broad steps leading down.*]

MARIAN

Father, where's Robin?

FITZWALTER

Child, I bade you stay
Until I called you.

MARIAN

Something frightened me!
Father, where's Robin? Where's Robin?

FITZWALTER

Hush, Marian, hark!

[*All stand listening.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Stealing to the foot of the stairs and whispering to* Lady Marian.]

Lady, they're all so silent now. I'll tell you
I had a dream last night—there was a man
That bled to death, because of four grey walls
And a black-hooded nun.

FITZWALTER

[*Angrily.*]

Hist, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[*The third bugle sounds. There is a clamour at the doors.*
Enter Prince John *and his retainers.*]

JOHN

[*Mockingly.*]

Now this is fortunate! I come in time
To see—Oh, what a picture! Lady Marian,
Forgive me—coming suddenly out of the dark
And seeing you there, robed in that dazzling white
Above these verdant gentlemen, I feel
Like one that greets the gracious evening star
Thro' a gap in a great wood.

Is aught amiss?
Why are you all so silent? Ah, my good,
My brave Fitzwalter, I most fervently
Trust I am not inopportune.

FITZWALTER

My lord,
I am glad that you can jest. I am sadly grieved
And sorely disappointed in that youth
Who has incurred your own displeasure.

JOHN

Ah?
Your future son-in-law?

FITZWALTER

Never on earth!
He is outlawed—

MARIAN

Outlawed!

FITZWALTER

And I wash my hands
Of Huntingdon. His shadow shall not darken
My doors again!

JOHN

That's vehement! Ha! ha!
And what does Lady Marian say?

MARIAN

My father
Speaks hastily. I am not so unworthy.

FITZWALTER

Unworthy?

MARIAN

Yes, unworthy as to desert him
Because he is in trouble—the bravest man
In England since the days of Hereward.
You know why he is outlawed!

FITZWALTER

[*To* PRINCE JOHN.]

Sir, she speaks
As the spoilt child of her old father's dotage.
Give her no heed. She shall not meet with him
On earth again, and till she promise this,
She'll sun herself within the castle garden
And never cross the draw-bridge.

MARIAN

Then I'll swim
The moat!

FRIAR TUCK

Ha! ha! well spoken.

MARIAN

Oh, you forget,
Father, you quite forget there is a King;
And, when the King comes home from the Crusade,
Will you forget Prince John and change once more?

[*Murmurs of assent from the* FORESTERS.]

JOHN

Enough of this.
Though I be prince, I am vice-gerent too!
Fitzwalter, I would have some private talk
With you and Lady Marian. Bid your guests
Remove a little—

FITZWALTER

I'll lead them all within!
And let them make what cheer they may. Come, friends.

[*He leads them up the stairs to the inner room.*]

My lord, I shall return immediately!

[*Exeunt* FITZWALTER *and the guests.*]

JOHN

Marian!

MARIAN

My lord!

JOHN

[*Drawing close to her.*]

I have come to urge a plea
On your behalf as well as on my own!
Listen, you may not know it—I must tell you.
I have watched your beauty growing like a flower,
With—why should I not say it—worship; yes,
Marian, I will not hide it.

MARIAN

Sir, you are mad!
Sir, and your bride, your bride, not three months wedded!
You cannot mean . . .

JOHN

Listen to me! Ah, Marian,
You'd be more merciful if you knew all!
D'you think that princes wed to please themselves?

MARIAN

Sir, English maidens do; and I am plighted
Not to a prince, but to an outlawed man.

JOHN

Listen to me! One word! Marian, one word!
I never meant you harm! Indeed, what harm
Could come of this? Is not your father poor?
I'd make him rich! Is not your lover outlawed?
I'd save him from the certain death that waits him.
You say the forest-laws afflict your soul
And his—you say you'd die for their repeal!
Well—I'll repeal them. All the churls in England
Shall bless your name and mix it in their prayers
With heaven itself.

MARIAN

The price?

JOHN

You call it that!
To let me lay the world before your feet,
To let me take this little hand in mine.
Why should I hide my love from you?

MARIAN

No more,
I'll hear no more! You are a prince, you say?

JOHN

One word—suppose it some small sacrifice,
To save those churls for whom you say your heart
Bleeds; yet you will not lift your little finger
To save them! And what hinders you?—A breath,
A dream, a golden rule! Can you not break it
For a much greater end?

MARIAN

I'd die to save them.

JOHN

Then live to save them.

MARIAN

No, you will not let me;
D'you think that bartering my soul will help
To save another? If there's no way but this,
Then through my lips those suffering hundreds cry,
We choose the suffering. All that is good in them,
All you have left, all you have not destroyed,
Cries out against you: and I'll go to them,
Suffer and toil and love and die with them
Rather than touch your hand. You over-rate
Your power to hurt our souls. You are mistaken!
There is a golden rule!

JOHN

And with such lips
You take to preaching! I was a fool to worry
Your soul with reason. With hair like yours—it's hopeless!
But Marian—you shall hear me.

[*He catches her in his arms.*]

Yes, by God,
Marian, you shall! I love you.

MARIAN

[*Struggling.*]

You should not live!

JOHN

One kiss, then! Devil take it.

[*Enter* FITZWALTER *above.*]

MARIAN

[*Wresting herself free.*]

You should not live!
Were I a man and not a helpless girl
You should not live!

JOHN

Come, now, that's very wicked.
See how these murderous words affright your father.
My good Fitzwalter, there's no need to look
So ghastly. For your sake and hers and mine
I have been trying to make your girl forget
The name of Huntingdon. A few short months
At our gay court would blot his memory out!
I promise her a life of dazzling pleasures,
And, in return she flies at me—a tigress—
Clamouring for my blood! Try to persuade her!

FITZWALTER

My lord, you are very good. She must decide
Herself.

JOHN

[*Angrily.*]

I'll not be trifled with! I hold
The hand of friendship out and you evade it.
The moment I am gone, back comes your outlaw.
You say you have no power with your own child!
Well, then I'll take her back this very night;
Back to the court with me. How do I know
What treasons you are hatching here? I'll take her
As hostage for yourself.

FITZWALTER

My lord, you jest!
I have sworn to you.

JOHN

No more! If you be loyal,
What cause have you to fear?

FITZWALTER

My lord, I'll give
A hundred other pledges; but not this.

JOHN

By heaven, will you dictate your terms to me?
I say that she shall come back to the court
This very night! Ho, there, my men.

[*Enter* JOHN'S *retainers.*]

Escort
This lady back with us.

FITZWALTER

Back there, keep back. Prince or no prince,
I say she shall not go!

[*He draws his sword.*]

I'd rather see her
Begging in rags with outlawed Huntingdon
Than that one finger of yours should soil her glove.

JOHN

So here's an end of fawning, here's the truth,
My old white-bearded hypocrite. Come, take her,
Waste no more time. Let not the old fool daunt you
With that great skewer.

FITZWALTER

[*As* JOHN'S *men advance.*]

By God, since you will have it,
Since you will drive me to my last resort,
Break down my walls, and hound me to the forest,
This is the truth! Out of my gates! Ho, help!
A Robin Hood! A Robin Hood!

[*There is a clamour from the upper room. The doors are flung open and the* FORESTERS *appear at the head of the steps.*]

FRIAR TUCK

[*Coming down into the hall and brandishing his quarter-staff.*]

A Robin?
Who calls on Robin Hood? His men are here
To answer.

FITZWALTER

Drive these villains out of my gates.

FRIAR TUCK

[*To* PRINCE JOHN.]

Sir, I perceive you are a man of wisdom,
So let me counsel you. There's not a lad
Up yonder, but at four-score yards can shoot
A swallow on the wing. They have drunken deep.
I cannot answer but their hands might loose
Their shafts before they know it. Now shall I give
The word? Ready, my lads!

[*The* FORESTERS *make ready to shoot.* JOHN *hesitates for a moment.*

JOHN

My Lady Marian,
One word, and then I'll take my leave of you!
[*She pays no heed.*]
Farewell, then! I have five-score men at hand!
And they shall be but lightning to the hell
Of my revenge, Fitzwalter. I will not leave
One stone upon another. From this night's work
Shall God Himself not save you.
[*Exeunt* JOHN *and his men.*]

FRIAR TUCK

[*As they go out.*]
My Lord Fitzwalter!
I have confessed him! Shall I bid 'em shoot?
'Twill save a world of trouble.

FITZWALTER

No; or the King
Himself will come against me. Follow them out,
Drive them out of my gates, then raise the drawbridge
And let none cross. Oh, I foresaw, foretold!
Robin has wrecked us all!
[*Exeunt the* FORESTERS *and* FITZWALTER. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *remains alone with* MARIAN.]

MARIAN

[*She flings herself down on a couch and buries her head in her arms.*]
O Robin, Robin,
I cannot lose you now!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Sitting at her feet. The lights grow dim.*]
Ah, well, the prince
Promised to break the walls down. Don't you think
These villains are a sort of ploughshare, lady,
And where they plough, who knows what wheat may spring!

The lights are burning low and very low;
So, Lady Marian, let me tell my dream.
There was a forester that bled to death
Because of four grey walls and a black nun
Whose face I could not see—but, oh, beware!
Though I am but your fool, your Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Dancing before the wild winds of the future,
I feel them thrilling through my tattered wits
Long ere your wisdom feels them. My poor brain
Is like a harp hung in a willow-tree
Swept by the winds of fate. I am but a fool,
But oh, beware of that black-hooded nun.

MARIAN

This is no time for jesting, Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

The lights are burning low. Do you not feel
A cold breath on your face?

MARIAN

Fling back that shutter!
Look out and tell me what is happening.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[Flinging back the shutter.]

Look,
Look, gossip, how the moon comes dancing in.
Ah, they have driven Prince John across the drawbridge.
They are raising it, now!

[There are cries in the distance, then a heavy sound of chains clanking and silence. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *turns from the window and stands in the stream of moonlight, pointing to the door on the left.]*

Look! Look!

MARIAN

[Starting up with a cry of fear.]

Ah!

[The tall figure of a nun glides into the moonlit hall and throwing back her hood reveals the face of QUEEN ELINOR.*]*

ELINOR

Lady Marion,
Tell me quickly, where is Huntingdon hiding?

MARIAN

The Queen!

ELINOR

Yes! Yes! I donned this uncouth garb
To pass through your besiegers. If Prince John
Discover it, all is lost. Come, tell me quickly,
Where is Robin?

MARIAN

Escaped, I hope.

ELINOR

Not here?

MARIAN

No!

ELINOR

Come, dear Lady Marian, do not doubt me.
I am here to save you both.

MARIAN

He is not here.

ELINOR

Ah, but you know where I may find him, Marian.
All will be lost if you delay to tell me
Where I may speak with him. He is in peril.
By dawn Prince John will have five hundred men

Beleaguering the castle. You are all ruined
Unless you trust me! Armies will scour the woods
To hunt him down. Even now he may be wounded,
Helpless to save himself.

MARIAN

Wounded!

ELINOR

Dear child,
Take me to him. Here, on this holy cross,
My mother's dying gift, I swear to you
I wish to save him.

MARIAN

Oh, but how?

ELINOR

Trust me!

MARIAN

Wounded! He may be wounded! Oh, if I could,
I'd go to him! I am helpless, prisoned here.
My father . . .

ELINOR

I alone can save your father.
Give me your word that if I can persuade him,
You'll lead me to your lover's hiding place,
And let me speak with him.

[*Enter* FITZWALTER.]

Ah, my Lord Fitzwalter!

FITZWALTER

The queen! O madam, madam, I am driven
Beyond myself. This girl, this foolish girl
Has brought us all to ruin. This Huntingdon,
As I foresaw, foresaw, foretold, foretold,
Has dragged me down with him.

ELINOR

I am on your side,
If you will hear me; and you yet may gain
A son in Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

Madam, I swear
I have done with him. I pray you do not jest;
But if you'll use your power to save my lands . . . .
I was provoked! . . . .
Prince John required this child here—

ELINOR

Oh, I know!
But you'll forgive him that! I do not wonder
That loveliness like hers—

FITZWALTER

Ay, but you'll pardon
A father's natural anger. Madam, I swear
I was indeed provoked. But you'll assure him
I've washed my hands of Huntingdon.

MARIAN

And yet
His men are, even now, guarding your walls!
Father, you cannot, you shall not—

FITZWALTER

Oh, be silent!
Who wrapt me in this tangle? Are you bent
On driving me out in my old age to seek
Shelter in caves and woods?

ELINOR

My good Fitzwalter,
It has not come to that! If you will trust me
All will be well; but I must speak a word
With Robin Hood.

FITZWALTER

You!

ELINOR

Oh, I have a reason.
Your daughter knows his hiding place.

FITZWALTER

She knows!

ELINOR

Oh, trust them both for that. I am risking much!
To-morrow she shall guide me there. This bird
Being flown, trust me to make your peace with John.

FITZWALTER

But—Marian!

ELINOR

She'll be safer far with Robin,
Than loitering here until your roof-tree burns.
I think you know it. Fitzwalter, I can save you,
I swear it on this cross.

FITZWALTER

But—Marian! Marian!

ELINOR

Your castle wrapt in flame! . . .
There's nought to fear,
If she could—Marian, once, at a court masque,
You wore a page's dress of Lincoln green,
And a green hood that muffled half your face,
I could have sworn 'twas Robin come again—
He was my page, you know—
Wear it to-morrow—go, child, bid your maid
Make ready—we'll set out betimes.

MARIAN

[*Going up to her father.*]

I'll go,
If you will let me, father. He may be wounded!
Father, forgive me. Let me go to him.

ELINOR

Go, child, first do my bidding. He'll consent
When you return.

[*Exit* MARIAN.]

My dear good friend Fitzwalter,
Trust me, I have some power with Huntingdon.
All shall be as you wish. I'll let her guide me,
But—as for her—she shall not even see him
Unless you wish. Trust me to wind them all
Around my little finger.

FITZWALTER

It is dark here.
Let us within. Madam, I think you are right.
And you'll persuade Prince John?

ELINOR

[*As they go up the steps.*]

I swear by this,
This holy cross, my mother's dying gift!

FITZWALTER

It's very sure he'd burn the castle down.

[*Exeunt.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Coming out into the moonlight and staring up after them.*]
The nun! The nun! They'll whip me if I speak,
For I am only Shadow-of-a Leaf, the Fool.

[*Curtain.*]

ACT II

SCENE I. *Sherwood Forest: An open glade, showing on the right the mouth of the outlaw's cave. It is about sunset. The giant figure of* LITTLE JOHN *comes out of the cave, singing.*

LITTLE JOHN

[*Sings.*]

When Spring comes back to England
And crowns her brows with may,
Round the merry moonlit world
She goes the greenwood way.

[*He stops and calls in stentorian tones.*]

Much! Much! Much! Where has he vanished now,
Where has that monstrous giant the miller's son
Hidden himself?

[*Enter* MUCH, *a dwarf-like figure, carrying a large bundle of ferns.*]

MUCH

Hush, hush, child, here I am!
And here's our fairy feather-beds, ha! ha!
Come, praise me, praise me, for a thoughtful parent.
There's nothing makes a better bed than ferns
Either for sleeping sound or rosy dreams.

LITTLE JOHN

Take care the fern-seed that the fairies use
Get not among thy yellow locks, my Titan,
Or thou'lt wake up invisible. There's none
Too much of Much already.

MUCH

[*Looking up at him impudently.*]

It would take
Our big barn full of fern-seed, I misdoubt,
To make thee walk invisible, Little John,
My sweet Tom Thumb! And, in this troublous age

Of forest-laws, if we night-walking minions,
We gentlemen of the moon, could only hunt
Invisible, there's many and many of us
With thumbs lopped off, eyes gutted and legs pruned,
Slick, like poor pollarded pear-trees, would be lying
Happy and whole this day beneath the boughs.

LITTLE JOHN

Invisible? Ay, but what would Jenny say
To such a ghostly midge as thou would'st be
Sipping invisibly at her cherry lips.

MUCH

Why, there now, that's a teaser. E'en as it is
(Don't joke about it) my poor Jenny takes
The smallness of her Much sorely to heart!
And though I often tell her half a loaf
(Ground in our mill) is better than no bread,
She weeps, poor thing, that an impartial heaven
Bestows on her so small a crumb of bliss
As me! You'd scarce believe, now, half the nostrums,
Possets and strangely nasty herbal juices
That girl has made me gulp, in the vain hope
That I, the frog, should swell to an ox like thee.
I tell her it's all in vain, and she still cheats
Her fancy and swears I've grown well nigh three feet
Already. O Lord, she's desperate. She'll advance
Right inward to the sources of creation,
She'll take the reins of the world in hand. She'll stop
The sun like Joshua, turn the moon to blood,
And if I have to swallow half the herbs
In Sherwood, I shall stalk a giant yet,
Shoulder to shoulder with thee, Little John,
And crack thy head at quarter-staff. But don't,
Don't joke about it. 'Tis a serious matter.

LITTLE JOHN

Into the cave, then, with thy feather-bed.
Old Much, thy father, waits thee there to make
A table of green turfs for Robin Hood.

We shall have guests anon, O merry times,
Baron and Knight and abbot, all that ride
Through Sherwood, all shall come and dine with him
When they have paid their toll! Old Much is there
Growling at thy delay.

MUCH

[*Going towards the cave.*]

O, my poor father.
Now, there's a sad thing, too. He is so ashamed
Of his descendants. Why for some nine years
He shut his eyes whenever he looked at me;
And I have seen him on the village green
Pretend to a stranger, once, who badgered him
With curious questions, that I was the son
Of poor old Gaffer Bramble, the lame sexton.
That self-same afternoon, up comes old Bramble
White hair a-blaze and big red waggling nose
All shaking with the palsy; bangs our door
Clean off its hinges with his crab-tree crutch,
And stands there—framed—against the sunset sky!
He stretches out one quivering fore-finger
At father, like the great Destroying Angel
In the stained window: straight, the milk boiled over,
The cat ran, baby squalled and mother screeched.
Old Bramble asks my father—what—what—what
He meant—he meant—he meant! You should have seen
My father's hopeless face! Lord, how he blushed,
Red as a beet-root! Lord, Lord, how he blushed!
'Tis a hard business when a parent looks —
Askance upon his offspring.

[*Exit into the cave.*]

LITTLE JOHN

Skip, you chatterer!
Here comes our master.

[*Enter* ROBIN HOOD.]

Master, where hast thou been?
I feared some harm had come to thee. What's this?
This was a cloth-yard shaft that tore thy coat!

ROBIN

Oh, ay, they barked my shoulder, devil take them.
I got it on the borders of the wood.
St. Nicholas, my lad, they're on the watch.

LITTLE JOHN

What didst thou there? They're on the watch, i' faith!
A squirrel could not pass them. Why, my namesake
Prince John would sell his soul to get thy head,
And both his ears for Lady Marian:
And whether his ears or soul be worth the more,
I know not. When the first lark flittered up
To sing, at dawn, I woke; and thou wast gone.
What didst thou there?

ROBIN

Well, first I went to swim
In the deep pool below the mill.

LITTLE JOHN

I swam
Enough last night to last me many a day.
What then?

ROBIN

I could not wash away the thought
Of all you told me. If Prince John should dare!
That helpless girl! No, no, I will not think it.
Why, Little John, I went and tried to shoot
A grey goose wing thro' Lady Marian's casement.

LITTLE JOHN

Oh, ay, and a pink nosegay tied beneath it.
Now, master, you'll forgive your Little John,—
But that's midsummer madness and the may
Is only half in flower as yet. But why—
You are wounded—why are you so pale?

ROBIN

No—no—
Not wounded; but oh, my good faithful friend,
She is not there! I wished to send her warning.
I could not creep much closer; but I swear
I think the castle is in the hands of John.
I saw some men upon the battlements,
Not hers—I know—not hers!

LITTLE JOHN

Hist, who comes here?
[*He seizes his bow and stands ready to shoot.*]

ROBIN

Stop, man, it is the fool. Thank God, the fool,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf, my Marian's dainty fool.
How now, good fool, what news? What news?
[*Enter* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Good fool!
Should I be bad, sir, if I chanced to bring
No news at all? That is the wise man's way.
Thank heaven, I've lost my wits. I am but a leaf
Dancing upon the wild winds of the world,
A prophet blown before them. Well, this evening,
It is that lovely grey wind from the West
That silvers all the fields and all the seas,
And I'm the herald of May!

ROBIN

Come, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
I pray thee, do not jest.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I do not jest.
I am vaunt-courier to a gentleman,
A sweet slim page in Lincoln green who comes,
Wood-knife on hip, and wild rose in his face,

With golden news of Marian. Oh, his news
Is one crammed honeycomb, swelling with sweetness
In twenty thousand cells; but delicate!
So send thy man aside.

ROBIN

Go, Little John.

[LITTLE JOHN *goes into the cave.*]

Well, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, where is he?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

At this moment
His hair is tangled in a rose bush: hark,
He swears, like a young leopard! Nay, he is free.
Come, master page, here is that thief of love,
Give him your message. I'll to Little John.

[*Exit into the cave.* *Enter* MARIAN, *as a page in Lincoln green, her face muffled in a hood.*]

ROBIN

Good even, master page, what is thy news
Of Lady Marian?

[*She stands silent.*]

Answer me quickly, come,
Hide not thy face!

[*She still stands muffled and silent.*]

Come, boy, the fool is chartered,
Not thou; and I'll break off this hazel switch
And make thee dance if thou not answer me.
What? Silent still? Sirrah, this hazel wand
Shall lace thee till thou tingle, top to toe.
I'll . . .

MARIAN

[*Unmuffling.*]

Robin!

ROBIN

[*Catches her in his arms with a cry.*]

Marian! Marian!

MARIAN

Fie upon you,
Robin, you did not know me.

ROBIN

[*Embracing her.*]

Oh, you seemed
Ten thousand miles away. This is not moonlight,
And I am not Endymion. Could I dream
My Dian would come wandering through the fern
Before the sunset? Even that rose your face
You muffled in its own green leaves.

MARIAN

But you,
Were hidden in the heart of Sherwood, Robin,
Hidden behind a million mighty boughs,
And yet I found you.

ROBIN

Ay, the young moon stole
In pity down to her poor shepherd boy;
But he could never climb the fleecy clouds
Up to her throne, never could print one kiss
On her immortal lips. He lay asleep
Among the poppies and the crags of Latmos,
And she came down to him, his queen stole down.

MARIAN

Oh, Robin, first a rose and then a moon,
A rose that breaks at a breath and falls to your feet,
The fickle moon—Oh, hide me from the world;
For there they say love goes by the same law!
Let me be outlawed then. I cannot change.
Sweetheart, sweetheart, Prince John will hunt me down!
Prince John—Queen Elinor will hunt me down!

ROBIN

Queen Elinor! Nay, but tell me what this means?
How came you here?

MARIAN

The Queen—she came last night,
Made it an odious kind of praise to me
That he, not three months wedded to his bride,
Should—pah!
And then she said five hundred men
Were watching round the borders of the wood;
But she herself would take me safely through them,
Said that I should be safer here with Robin,
She had your name so pat—and I gave way.
[*Enter* QUEEN ELINOR *behind. She conceals herself to listen.*]

ROBIN

Marian, she might have trapped you to Prince John.

MARIAN

No; no; I think she wanted me to guide her
Here to your hiding place. She wished to see you
Herself, unknown to John, I know not why.
It was my only way. Her skilful tongue
Quite won my father over, made him think,
Poor father, clinging to his lands again,
He yet might save them. And so, without ado
(It will be greatly to the joy of Much,
Your funny little man), I bade my maid
Jenny, go pack her small belongings up
This morning, and to follow with Friar Tuck
And Widow Scarlet. They'll be here anon.

ROBIN

Where did you leave the Queen?

MARIAN

Robin, she tried
To kill me! We were deep within the wood
And she began to tell me a wild tale,
Saying that I reminded her of days
When Robin was her page, and how you came
To Court, a breath of April in her life,

And how you worshipped her, and how she grew
To love you. But she saw you loved me best
(So would she mix her gall and lies with honey),
So she would let you go. And then she tried
To turn my heart against you, bade me think
Of all the perils of your outlawry,
Then flamed with anger when she found my heart
Steadfast; and when I told her we drew nigh
The cave, she bade me wait and let her come
First, here, to speak with you. Some devil's trick
Gleamed in her smile, the way some women have
Of smiling with their lips, wreathing the skin
In pleasant ripples, laughing with their teeth,
While the cold eyes watch, cruel as a snake's
That fascinates a bird. I'd not obey her.
She whipped a dagger out. Had it not been
For Shadow-of-a-Leaf, who dogged us all the way,
Poor faithful fool, and leapt out at her hand,
She would have killed me. Then she darted away
Like a wild thing into the woods, trying to find
Your hiding place most like.

ROBIN

O Marian, why,
Why did you trust her? Listen, who comes here?
[*Enter* FRIAR TUCK, JENNY *and* WIDOW SCARLET.]
Ah, Friar Tuck!

MARIAN

Good Jenny!

ROBIN

And Widow Scarlet!

FRIAR TUCK

O children, children, this is thirsty weather!
The heads I have cracked, the ribs I have thwacked, the bones
I have bashed with my good quarter-staff, to bring
These bits of womankind through Sherwood Forest.

ROBIN

What, was there scuffling, friar?

FRIAR TUCK

Some two or three
Pounced on us, ha! ha! ha!

JENNY

A score at least,
Mistress, most unchaste ruffians.

FRIAR TUCK

They've gone home,
Well chastened by the Church. This pastoral staff
Mine oaken *Pax Vobiscum*, sent 'em home
To think about their sins, with watering eyes.
You never saw a bunch of such blue faces,
Bumpy and juicy as a bunch of grapes
Bruised in a Bacchanalian orgy, dripping
The reddest wine a man could wish to see.

ROBIN

I picture it—those big brown hands of thine
Grape-gathering at their throttles, ha! ha! ha!
Come, Widow Scarlet, come, look not so sad.

WIDOW SCARLET

O master, master, they have named the day
For killing of my boy.

ROBIN

They have named the day
For setting of him free, then, my good dame.
Be not afraid. We shall be there, eh, Friar?
Grape-gathering, eh?

FRIAR

Thou'lt not be there thyself
My son, the game's too dangerous now, methinks.

ROBIN

I shall be there myself. The game's too good
To lose. We'll all be there. You're not afraid,
Marian, to spend a few short hours alone
Here in the woods with Jenny.

MARIAN

Not for myself,
Robin.

ROBIN

We shall want every hand that day,
And you'll be safe enough. You know we go
Disguised as gaping yokels, old blind men,
With patches on their eyes, poor wandering beggars,
Pedlars with pins and poking-sticks to sell;
And when the time is come—a merry blast
Rings out upon a bugle and suddenly
The Sheriff is aware that Sherwood Forest
Has thrust its green boughs up beneath his feet.
Off go the cloaks and all is Lincoln green,
Great thwacking clubs and twanging bows of yew.
Oh, we break up like nature thro' the laws
Of that dark world; and then, good Widow Scarlet,
Back to the cave we come and your good Will
Winds his big arm about you once again.
Go, Friar, take her in and make her cosy.
Jenny, your Much will grow three feet at least
With joy to welcome you. He is in the cave.
[FRIAR TUCK *and* WIDOW SCARLET *go towards the cave.*]

FRIAR TUCK

Now for a good bowse at a drinking can.
I've got one cooling in the cave, unless
That rascal, Little John, has drunk it all.
[*Exeunt into cave.*]

JENNY

[*To* MARIAN.]

Mistress, I haven't spoke a word to you
For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Go, little tyrant, and be kind to Much.

JENNY

Mistress, it isn't Much I want. Don't think
Jenny comes trapesing through these awful woods
For Much. I haven't spoke a word with you
For nigh three hours. 'Tis most unkind, I think.

MARIAN

Wait, Jenny, then, I'll come and talk with you.
Robin, she is a tyrant; but she loves me.
And if I do not go, she'll pout and sulk
Three days on end. But she's a wondrous girl.
She'd work until she dropped for me. Poor Jenny!

ROBIN

That's a quaint tyranny. Go, dear Marian, go;
But not for long. We have so much to say.
Come quickly back.
[*Exit* MARIAN. ROBIN *paces thoughtfully across the glade.*
QUEEN ELINOR *steals out of her hiding place and stands before him.*]
You here!

ELINOR

Robin, can you
Believe that girl? Am I so treacherous?

ROBIN

It seems you have heard whate'er I had to say.

ELINOR

Surely you cannot quite forget those days
When you were kind to me. Do you remember
The sunset through that oriel?

ROBIN

Ay, a god
Grinning thro' a horse-collar at a pitiful page,
Dazed with the first red gleam of what he thought
Life, as the trouveres find it! I am ashamed,
Remembering how your quick tears blinded me!

ELINOR

Ashamed! You—you—that in my bitter grief
When Rosamund—

ROBIN

I know! I thought your woes,
Those tawdry relics of your treacheries,
Wrongs quite unparalleled. I would have fought
Roland himself to prove you spotless then.

ELINOR

Oh, you speak thus to me! Robin, beware!
I have come to you, I have trampled on my pride,
Set all on this one cast! If you should now
Reject me, humble me to the dust before
That girl, beware! I never forget, I warn you;
I never forgive.

ROBIN

Are you so proud of that?

ELINOR

Ah, well, forgive me, Robin. I'll save you yet
From all these troubles of your outlawry!
Trust me—for I can wind my poor Prince John
Around my little finger. Who knows—with me
To help you—there are but my two sons' lives
That greatly hinder it—why, yourself might reign
Upon the throne of England.

ROBIN

Are you so wrapped
In treacheries, helplessly false, even to yourself,
That now you do not know falsehood from truth,
Darkness from light?

ELINOR

O Robin, I was true
At least to you. If I were false to others,
At least I—

ROBIN

No—not that—that sickening plea
Of truth in treachery. Treachery cannot live
With truth. The soul wherein they are wedded dies
Of leprosy.

ELINOR

[*Coming closer to him.*]

Have you no pity, Robin,
No kinder word than this for the poor creature
That crept—Ah, feel my heart, feel how it beats!
No pity?

ROBIN

Five years ago this might have moved me!

ELINOR

No pity?

ROBIN

None. There is no more to say.
My men shall guide you safely through the wood.

ELINOR

I never forgive!

[*Enter* MARIAN *from the cave; she stands silent and startled.*]

ROBIN

My men shall guide you back.
[*Calls.*]
Ho, there, my lads!

[*Enter several of the* OUTLAWS.]

This lady needs a guide
Back thro' the wood.

ELINOR

Good-bye, then, Robin, and good-bye to you,
Sweet mistress! You have wronged me! What of that?
For—when we meet—Come, lead on, foresters!

[*Exeunt the* QUEEN *and her guides.*]

MARIAN

O Robin, Robin, hów the clouds begin
To gather—how that woman seems to have brought
A nightmare on these woods.

ROBIN

Forget it all!
She is so tangled in those lies the world
Draws round some men and women, none can help her.
Marian, for God's sake, let us quite forget
That nightmare! Oh, that perfect brow of yours,
Those perfect eyes, pure as the violet wells
That only mirror heaven and are not dimmed
Except by clouds that drift thro' heaven and catch
God's glory in the sunset and the dawn.

MARIAN

It is enough for them simply to speak
The love they hold for you. But—I still fear.
Robin—think you—she might have overheard
Your plan—the rescue of Will Scarlet?

ROBIN

Why—
No—No—some time had passed, and yet—she seemed
To have heard your charge against her! No, she guessed it.
Come—let us brush these cobwebs from our minds.
Look how the first white star begins to tremble
Like a big blossom in that sycamore.
Now you shall hear our forest ritual.
Ho, Little John! Summon the lads together!

[*The* OUTLAWS *come out of the cave.* LITTLE JOHN *blows a bugle and others come in from the forest.*]

Friar, read us the rules.

FRIAR TUCK

First, shall no man
Presume to call our Robin Hood or any
By name of Earl, lord, baron, knight or squire,
But simply by their names as men and brothers:
Second, that Lady Marian while she shares
Our outlaw life in Sherwood shall be called
Simply Maid Marian. Thirdly, we that follow
Robin, shall never in thought or word or deed
Do harm to widow, wife or maid; but hold,
Each, for his mother's or sister's or sweetheart's sake,
The glory of womanhood, a sacred thing,
A star twixt earth and heaven. Fourth, whomsoever
Ye meet in Sherwood ye shall bring to dine
With Robin, saving carriers, posts and folk
That ride with food to serve the market towns
Or any, indeed, that serve their fellow men.
Fifth, you shall never do the poor man wrong,
Nor spare a priest or usurer. You shall take
The waste wealth of the rich to help the poor,
The baron's gold to stock the widow's cupboard,
The naked ye shall clothe, the hungry feed,
And lastly shall defend with all your power
All that are trampled under by the world,
The old, the sick and all men in distress.

ROBIN

So, if it be no dream, we shall at last
Hasten the kingdom of God's will on earth.
There shall be no more talk of rich and poor,
Norman and Saxon. We shall be one people,
One family, clustering all with happy hands
And faces round that glowing hearth, the sun.
Now let the bugle sound a golden challenge
To the great world. Greenleaf, a forest call!

[REYNOLD GREENLEAF *blows a resounding call.*]

Now let the guards be set; and then, to sleep!
To-morrow there'll be work enough for all.
The hut for Jenny and Maid Marian!
Come, you shall see how what we lack in halls
We find in bowers. Look how from every branch
Such tapestries as kings could never buy
Wave in the starlight. You'll be waked at dawn
By feathered choirs whose notes were taught in heaven.

MUCH

Come, Jenny, come, we must prepare the hut
For Mistress Marian. Here's a bundle of ferns!
[*They go into the hut. The light is growing dimmer and richer.*]

LITTLE JOHN

And here's a red cramoisy cloak, a baron
[*Handing them in at the door.*]
Dropt, as he fled one night from Robin Hood;
And here's a green, and here's a midnight blue,
All soft as down. But wait, I'll get you more.
[*Two of the* OUTLAWS *appear at the door with deerskins.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *stands behind them with a great bunch of flowers and ferns.*]

FIRST OUTLAW

Here's fawn-skins, milder than a maiden's cheek.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, you should talk in rhyme! The world should sing
Just for this once in tune, if Love were king!

SECOND OUTLAW

Here's deer-skins, for a carpet, smooth and meek.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I knew you would! Ha! ha! Now look at what I bring!
[*He throws flowers into the hut, spray by spray, speaking in a kind of ecstasy.*]
Here's lavender and love and sweet wild thyme,
And dreams and blue-bells that the fairies chime,
Here's meadow-sweet and moonlight, bound in posies,
With ragged robin, traveller's joy and roses,
And here—just three leaves from a weeping willow;
And here—that's best—deep poppies for your pillow.

MUCH

And here's a pillow that I made myself,
Stuffed with dry rose-leaves and grey pigeon's down,
The softest thing on earth except my heart!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Going aside and throwing himself down among the ferns to watch.*]
Just three sweet breaths and then the song is flown!
[MUCH *looks at him for a moment with a puzzled face, then turns to the hut again.*]

MUCH

Jenny, here, take it—though I'm fond of comforts,
Take it and give it to Maid Marian.

JENNY

Why, Much, 'tis bigger than thyself.

MUCH

Hush, child.
I meant to use it lengthways. 'Twould have made
A feather-bed complete for your poor Much,
Take it!

[*The* OUTLAWS *all go into the cave.*]

MARIAN

O Robin, what a fairy palace!
How cold and grey the walls of castles seem
Beside your forest's fragrant halls and bowers.
I do not think that I shall be afraid
To sleep this night, as I have often been
Beneath our square bleak battlements.

ROBIN

And look,
Between the boughs, there is your guard, all night,
That great white star, white as an angel's wings,
White as the star that shone on Bethlehem!
Good-night, sweetheart, good-night!

MARIAN

Good-night!

ROBIN

One kiss!
Oh, clear bright eyes, dear heavens of sweeter stars,
Where angels play, and your own sweeter soul
Smiles like a child into the face of God,
Good-night! Good-night!

[MARIAN *goes into the hut. The door is shut.* ROBIN *goes to the mouth of the cave and throws himself down on a couch of deerskins. The light grows dimly rich and fairy-like.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Rising to his knees.*]

Here comes the little cloud!

[*A little moonlit cloud comes floating down between the tree-tops into the glade.* TITANIA *is seen reposing upon it. She steps to earth. The cloud melts away.*]

How blows the wind from fairyland, Titania?

TITANIA

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the wicked queen has heard
Your master's plan for saving poor Will Scarlet.
She knows Maid Marian will be left alone,
Unguarded in these woods. The wicked Prince
Will steal upon her loneliness. He plots
To carry her away.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?
Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

TITANIA

No, no; you cannot, even if you would,
Convey our fairy lore to mortal ears.
When have they heard our honeysuckle bugles
Blowing reveille to the crimson dawn?
We can but speak by dreams; and, if you spoke,
They'd whip you, for your words would all ring false
Like sweet bells out of tune.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

What can we do?

TITANIA

Nothing, except on pain of death, to stay
The course of Time and Tide. There's Oberon!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon!

TITANIA

He can tell you more than I.
[*Enter* OBERON.]

OBERON

Where's Orchis? Where's our fairy trumpeter
To call the court together?

ORCHIS

Here, my liege.

OBERON

Bugle them hither; let thy red cheeks puff
Until thy curled petallic trumpet thrill
More loudly than a yellow-banded bee
Thro' all the clover clumps and boughs of thyme.
They are scattered far abroad.

ORCHIS

My liege, it shall
Outroar the very wasp!

[*Exit.*]

OBERON

[*As he speaks, the fairies come flocking from all sides into the glade.*]

Methinks they grow
Too fond of feasting. As I passed this way
I saw the fairy halls of hollowed oaks
All lighted with their pale green glow-worm lamps.
And under great festoons of maiden-hair
Their brilliant mushroom tables groaned with food.
Hundreds of rose-winged fairies banqueted!
All Sherwood glittered with their prismy goblets
Brimming the thrice refined and luscious dew
Not only of our own most purplest violets,
But of strange fragrance, wild exotic nectars,
Drawn from the fairy blossoms of some star
Beyond our tree-tops! Ay, beyond that moon
Which is our natural limit—the big lamp
Heaven lights upon our boundary.

ORCHIS

Mighty King,
The Court is all attendant on thy word.

OBERON

[*With great dignity.*]

Elves, pixies, nixies, gnomes and leprechauns,

[*He pauses.*]

We are met, this moonlight, for momentous councils
Concerning those two drowsy human lovers,
Maid Marian and her outlawed Robin Hood.
They are in dire peril; yet we may not break
Our vows of silence. Many a time
Has Robin Hood by kindly words and deeds
Done in his human world, sent a new breath
Of life and joy like Spring to fairyland;
And at the moth-hour of this very dew-fall,
He saved a fairy, whom he thought, poor soul,
Only a may-fly in a spider's web,
He saved her from the clutches of that Wizard,
That Cruel Thing, that dark old Mystery,
Whom ye all know and shrink from—

[*Exclamations of horror from the fairies.*]

Plucked her forth,
So gently that not one bright rainbow gleam
Upon her wings was clouded, not one flake
Of bloom brushed off—there lies the broken web.
Go, look at it; and here is pale Perilla
To tell you all the tale.

[*The fairies cluster to look at the web, etc.*]

A FAIRY

Can we not make them free
Of fairyland, like Shadow-of-a-Leaf, to come
And go, at will, upon the wings of dreams?

OBERON

Not till they lose their wits like Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Can I not break my fairy vows and tell?

OBERON

Only on pain of what we fairies call
Death!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death?

OBERON

Never to join our happy revels,
Never to pass the gates of fairyland
Again, but die like mortals. What that means
We do not know—who knows?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

If I could save them!—
I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

OBERON

There is a King
Beyond the seas. If he came home in time,
All might be well. We fairies only catch
Stray gleams, wandering shadows of things to come.

TITANIA

Oh, if the King came home from the Crusade!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Why will he fight for graves beyond the sea?

OBERON

Our elfin couriers brought the news at dusk
That Lion-Heart, while wandering home thro' Europe,
In jet-black armour, like an errant knight,
Despite the great red cross upon his shield,
Was captured by some wicked prince and thrust
Into a dungeon. Only a song, they say,
Can break those prison-bars. There is a minstrel

That loves his King. If he should roam the world
Singing until from that dark tower he hears
The King reply, the King would be set free.

TITANIA

Only a song, only a minstrel?

OBERON

Ay;
And Blondel is his name.
[*A long, low sound of wailing is heard in the distance. The fairies shudder and creep together.*]

TITANIA

Hark, what is that?

OBERON

The cry of the poor, the cry of the oppressed,
The sound of women weeping for their children,
The victims of the forest laws. The moan
Of that dark world where mortals live and die
Sweeps like an icy wind thro' fairyland.
And oh, it may grow bitterer yet, that sound!
'Twas Merlin's darkest prophecy that earth
Should all be wrapped in smoke and fire, the woods
Hewn down, the flowers discoloured and the sun
Begrimed, until the rows of lifeless trees
Against the greasy sunset seemed no more
Than sooty smudges of an ogre's thumbs
Upon the sweating forehead of a slave.
While, all night long, fed with the souls of men,
And bodies, too, great forges blast and burn
Till the great ogre's cauldrons brim with gold.
[*The wailing sound is heard again in the distance.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

To be shut out for ever, only to hear
Those cries! I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the fool,
I cannot face it! Is there no hope but this?
No hope for Robin and Maid Marian?

OBERON

If the great King comes home from the Crusade
In time! If not,—there is another King
Beyond the world, they say.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Death, that dark death!
To leave the sunlight and the flowers for ever!
I cannot bear it! Oh, I cannot tell them.
I'll wait—perhaps the great King will come home,
If not—Oh, hark, a wandering minstrel's voice?

OBERON

Who is drawing hither? Listen, fairies, listen!
[*Song heard approaching thro' the wood.*]

Knight on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
"Onward," I heard him say,
"Love, to thy side!"

"Nay," sang a bird above;
"Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee."

[*The song breaks off. Enter a* MINSTREL, *leading a great white steed. He pauses, confronted by the fairy host. The moonlight dazzles him.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Minstrel, art thou, too, free of fairyland?
Where wouldst thou ride? What is thy name?

MINSTREL

My name
Is Blondel.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Blondel!

THE FAIRIES

Blondel!

MINSTREL

And I ride
Through all the world to seek and find my King!

[*He passes through the fairy host and goes into the woods on the further side of the glade, continuing his song, which dies away in the distance.*]

[*Song.*]

"Death? What is death?" he cried.
"I must ride on,
On to my true love's side,
Up to her throne!"

[*Curtain.*]

ACT III

SCENE I. *May-day. An open place* (*near* NOTTINGHAM). *A crowd of rustics and townsfolk assembling to see the execution of* WILL SCARLET.

FIRST RUSTIC

A sad may-day! Where yonder gallows glowers,
We should have raised the may-pole.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, no songs,
No kisses in the ring, no country dances
To-day; no lads and lasses on the green,
Crowning their queen of may.

[*Enter* ROBIN HOOD, *disguised as an old beggar, with a green patch on one eye.*]

ROBIN

Is this the place,
Masters, where they're a-goin' to hang Will Scarlet?

FIRST RUSTIC

Ay, father, more's the pity.

ROBIN

Eh! Don't ye think
There may be scuffling, masters? There's a many
That seems to like him well, here, roundabouts.

SECOND RUSTIC

Too many halberts round him. There's no chance.

ROBIN

I've heard the forest might break out, the lads
In Lincoln green, you wot of! If they did?

FIRST RUSTIC

There's many here would swing a cudgel and help
To trip the Sheriff up. If Robin Hood
Were only here! But then he's outlawed now.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and there's big rewards out. It would be
Sure death for him to try a rescue now.
The biggest patch of Lincoln Green we'll see
This day, is that same patch on thy old eye,
Eh, lads!

THIRD RUSTIC

What's more, they say Prince John is out
This very day, scouring thro' Sherwood forest
In quest of Lady Marian!

ROBIN

[*Sharply.*]

You heard that?

THIRD RUSTIC

Ay, for they say she's flown to Sherwood forest.

SECOND RUSTIC

Ah! Ah? That's why he went. I saw Prince John!
With these same eyes I saw him riding out
To Sherwood, not an hour ago.

ROBIN

You saw him?

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, and he only took three men at arms.

FIRST RUSTIC

Three men at arms! Why then, he must ha' known
That Robin's men would all be busy here!
He's none so bold, he would not risk his skin!
I think there'll be some scuffling after all.

ROBIN

Ay, tell 'em so—go, spread it thro' the crowd!
[*He mutters to himself.*]
He'd take some time, to find her, but 'fore God
We must be quick; 'fore God we must be quick!

SECOND RUSTIC

Why, father, one would never think to see thee
Thou had'st so sound a heart!

FIRST RUSTIC

Ah, here they come!
The Sheriff and his men; and, in the midst,
There's poor Will Scarlet bound.

THE CROWD MURMURS

Ah, here they come!
Look at the halberts shining! Can you see him?

FIRST RUSTIC

There, there he is. His face is white: but, Lord,
He takes it bravely.

SECOND RUSTIC

He's a brave man, Will.

SHERIFF

Back with the crowd there, guards; delay no time!

SOME WOMEN IN THE CROWD

Ah, ah, poor lad!

ROBIN

[*Eagerly.*]

What are they doing now?
I cannot see!

FIRST RUSTIC

The Sheriff's angered now!

SECOND RUSTIC

Ay, for they say a messenger has come
From that same godless hangman whose lean neck
I'd like to twist, saying he is delayed.
'Tis the first godly deed he has ever done.

THIRD RUSTIC

The Sheriff says he will not be delayed.
But who will take the hangman's office?

ROBIN

Masters,
I have a thought; make way; let me bespeak
The Sheriff!

RUSTICS

How now, father, what's to do?

ROBIN

Make way, I tell you. Here's the man they want!

SHERIFF

What's this?

ROBIN

Good master Sheriff, I've a grudge
Against Will Scarlet. Let me have the task
Of sending him to heaven!

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

SHERIFF

Come on, then, and be brief!

ROBIN

I'm not a hangman;
But I can cleave your thinnest hazel wand
At sixty yards.

SHERIFF

Shoot, then, and make an end.
Make way there, clear the way!
[*An opening is made in the crowd.* ROBIN *stands in the gap.* WILL SCARLET *is not seen by the audience.*]

CROWD

Ah-h-h, the old devil!

ROBIN

I'll shoot him one on either side, just graze him,
To show you how I love him; then the third
Slick in his heart.

[*He shoots. A murmur goes up from the crowd. The crowd hides* WILL SCARLET *during the shooting. But* ROBIN *remains in full view, in the opening.*]

SHERIFF

[*Angrily.*]
Take care! You've cut the cord
That bound him on that side!

ROBIN

Then here's the second!
I will be careful!
[*He takes a steady aim.*]

A RUSTIC TO HIS NEIGHBOURS

I' faith, lads, he can shoot!
What do you think—that green patch on his eye
Smacks of the merry men! He's tricking them!
[Robin *shoots. A louder murmur goes up from the crowd.*]

SHERIFF

You have cut the rope again!

A CRY

He has cut him free!

ROBIN

All right! All right! It's just to tease the dog!
Here's for the third now!
[*He aims and shoots quickly. There is a loud cry of a wounded man; then a shout from the crowd.*]

THE CROWD

Ah-h-h, he has missed; he has killed
One of the guards!

FIRST RUSTIC

What has he done?

SECOND RUSTIC

He has killed
One of the Sheriff's men!

SHERIFF

There's treachery here!
I'll cleave the first man's heart that moves!

ROBIN

Will Scarlet,
Pick up that dead man's halbert!

SHERIFF

Treachery! Help!
Down with the villain!

ROBIN

[*Throws off his beggar's crouch and hurls the* SHERIFF *and several of his men back amongst the crowd. His cloak drops off.*]
Sherwood! A merry Sherwood!

CROWD

Ah! ha! The Lincoln Green! A Robin Hood!
[*A bugle rings out and immediately some of the yokels throw off their disguise and the Lincoln green appears as by magic amongst the crowd. The guards are rushed and hustled by them. Robin and several of his men make a ring round* WILL SCARLET.]

SHERIFF

It is the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon:
There is a great reward upon his head.
Down with him!
[*The* SHERIFF'S *men make a rush at the little band.* A KNIGHT *in jet black armour, with a red-cross shield, suddenly appears and forces his way through the mob, sword in hand.*]

KNIGHT

What, so many against so few!
Back, you wild wolves. Now, foresters, follow me,
For our St. George and merry England, charge,
Charge them, my lads!
[*The* FORESTERS *make a rush with him and the* SHERIFF *and his men take to flight.*]

ROBIN

Now back to Sherwood, swiftly!
A horse, or I shall come too late; a horse!
[*He sees the* KNIGHT *in armour standing by his horse.*]
Your pardon, sir; our debt to you is great,
Too great almost for thanks; but if you be
Bound by the vows of chivalry, I pray you
Lend me your charger; and my men will bring you
To my poor home in Sherwood. There you'll find
A most abundant gratitude.

KNIGHT

Your name?

ROBIN

Was Huntingdon; but now is Robin Hood.

KNIGHT

If I refuse?

ROBIN

Then, sir, I must perforce
Take it. I am an outlaw, but the law
Of manhood still constrains me—'tis a matter
Of life and death—

KNIGHT

Take it and God be with you!
I'll follow you to Sherwood with your men.
[ROBIN *seizes the horse, leaps to the saddle, and gallops away.*]
[*Curtain.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest. Outside the cave.* JENNY, MARIAN *and* WIDOW SCARLET.

MARIAN

This dreadful waiting! How I wish that Robin
Had listened to the rest and stayed with me.
How still the woods are! Jenny, do you think

There will be fighting? Oh, I am selfish, mother;
You need not be afraid. Robin will bring
Will Scarlet safely back to Sherwood. Why,
Perhaps they are all returning even now!
Cheer up! How long d'you think they've been away,
Jenny, six hours or more? The sun is high,
And all the dew is gone.

JENNY

Nay, scarce three hours.
Now don't you keep a-fretting. They'll be back,
Quite soon enough. I've scarcely spoke with you,
This last three days and more; and even now
It seems I cannot get you to myself,
Two's quite enough.

[*To* WIDOW SCARLET.]

Come, widow, come with me.
I'll give you my own corner in the hut
And make you cosy. If you take a nap
Will Scarlet will be here betimes you wake.

[*Takes her to the hut and shuts her in.*]

There, drat her, for a mumping mumble-crust!

MARIAN

Come, Jenny, that's too bad; the poor old dame
Is lonely.

JENNY

She's not lonely when she sleeps,
And if I never get you to myself
Where was the good of trapesing after you
And living here in Sherwood like wild rabbits?
You ha'nt so much as let me comb your hair
This last three days and more.

MARIAN

Well, comb it, Jenny,
Now, if you like, and comb it all day long;
But don't get crabbéd, and don't speak so crossly!

[JENNY *begins loosening* MARIAN'S *hair and combing it.*]

JENNY

Why, Mistress, it grows longer every day.
It's far below your knees, and how it shines!
And wavy, just like Much the Miller's brook,
Where it comes tumbling out into the sun,
Like gold, red gold.

MARIAN

Ah, that's provoking, Jenny,
For you forgot to bring me my steel glass,
And, if you chatter so, I shall soon want it.

JENNY

I've found a very good one at a pinch.
There's a smooth silver pool, down in the stream,
Where you can see your face most beautiful.

MARIAN

So that's how Jenny spends her lonely hours,
A sad female Narcissus, while poor Much
Dwines to an Echo!

JENNY

I don't like those gods.
I never cared for them. But, as for Much,
Much is the best of all the merry men.
And, mistress, O, he speaks so beautifully,
It *might* be just an Echo from blue hills
Far, far away! You see he's quite a scholar:
Much, more an' most (That's what he calls the three
Greasy caparisons—much, more an' most)!
You see they thought that being so very small
They could not make him grow to be a man,
They'd make a scholar of him instead. The Friar
Taught him his letters. He can write his name,
And mine, and yours, just like a missal book,
In lovely colours; and he always draws
The first big letter of JENNY like a tree
With naked Cupids hiding in the branches.

Mistress, I don't believe you hear one word
I ever speak to you! Your eyes are always
That far and far away.

MARIAN

I'm listening, Jenny!

JENNY

Well, when he draws the first big M of yours,
He makes it like a bridge from earth to heaven,
With white-winged angels passing up and down;
And, underneath the bridge, in a black stream,
He puts the drowning face of the bad Prince
Holding his wicked hands out, while a devil
Stands on the bank and with a pointed stake
Keeps him from landing—
Ah, what's that? What's that?

MARIAN

O Jenny, how you startled me!

JENNY

I thought
I saw that same face peering thro' the ferns
Yonder—there—see, they are shaking still.
[*She screams.*]
Ah! Ah!

[PRINCE JOHN *and another man appear advancing across the glade.*]

JOHN

So here's my dainty tigress in her den,
And—Warman—there's a pretty scrap for you
Beside her. Now, sweet mistress, will you deign
To come with me, to change these cheerless woods
For something queenlier? If I be not mistaken,
You have had time to tire of that dark cave.
Was I not right, now? Surely you can see

Those tresses were not meant to waste their gold
Upon this desert. Nay, but Marian, hear me.
I do not jest.

[*At a sign from* MARIAN, JENNY *goes quickly inside the cave.*]

That's well! Dismiss your maid!
Warman, remove a little.

[*His man retires.*]

I see you think
A little better of me! Out in the wood
There waits a palfrey for you, and the stirrup
Longs, as I long, to clasp your dainty foot.
I am very sure by this you must be tired
Of outlawry, a lovely maid like you.

[*He draws nearer.*]

MARIAN

Wait—I must think, must think.

JOHN

Give me your hand!
Why do you shrink from me? If you could know
The fire that burns me night and day, you would not
Refuse to let me snatch one cooling kiss
From that white hand of yours.

MARIAN

If you be prince,
You will respect my loneliness and go.

JOHN

How can I leave you, when by day and night
I see that face of yours.
I'll not pretend
I do not love you, do not long for you,
Desire and hunger for your kiss, your touch!
I'll not pretend to be a saint, you see!
I hunger and thirst for you. Marian, Marian.

MARIAN

You are mad!

JOHN

Ay, mad for you.

Body and soul
I am broken up with love for you. Your eyes
Flash like the eyes of a tigress, and I love them
The better for it.
Ah, do not shrink from me!
[JENNY *comes out of the cave and hands* MARIAN *a bow. She leaps back and aims it at* JOHN.]

MARIAN

Back, you wild beast, or by the heaven above us,
I'll kill you! Now, don't doubt me. I can shoot
Truly as any forester. I swear,
Prince or no prince, king or no king, I'll kill you
If you should stir one step from where you stand.

JOHN

Come, come, sweet Marian, put that weapon down.
I was beside myself, was carried away.
I cannot help my love for—

MARIAN

I'll not hear
Another sickening word: throw down your arms,
That dagger at your side.

JOHN

Oh, that's too foolish,
Marian, I swear—

MARIAN

You see that rusty stain
Upon the silver birch down yonder? Watch.

[*She shoots. Then swiftly aims at him again.*]

Now, throw your weapon down.
[*He pulls out the dagger and throws it down, with a shrug of his shoulders. One of his men steals up behind* MARIAN.]

JENNY

Ah, Mistress Marian,
There's one behind you! Look!
[*The man springs forward and seizes* MARIAN'S *arms.*]

JOHN

[*Coming forward and taking hold of her also.*]
So, my sweet tigress,
You're trapped then, are you? Well, we'll waste no time!
We'll talk this over when we reach the castle.
Keep off the maid, there, Warman; I can manage
This turbulent beauty. Ah, by God, you shall
Come! Ah? God's blood, what's this?
[MARIAN *has succeeded in drawing her dagger and slightly wounding him. She wrests herself free.*]

MARIAN

Keep back, I warn you!

JOHN

[*Advancing slowly.*]
Strike, now strike if you will. You will not like
To see the red blood spurting up your hand.
That's not maid's work. Come, strike!
[ROBIN HOOD *appears at the edge of the glade behind him*
You see, you cannot!
Your heart is tenderer than you think.

ROBIN

[*Quietly.*]
Prince John!

JOHN

[*Turns round and confronts* ROBIN.]
Out with your blade, Warman; call up the rest!
We can strike freely now, without a fear
Of marring the sweet beauty of the spoil.
We four can surely make an end of him.

Have at him, lads, and swiftly, or the thieves
Will all be down on us.
[ROBIN *draws his sword and sets his back to an oak. The other two followers of* PRINCE JOHN *come out of the wood.*]

ROBIN

Come on, all four!
This oak will shift its roots before I budge
One inch from four such howling wolves. Come on;
You must be tired of fighting women-folk.
Come on! By God, sir, you must guard your head
Better than that,
[*He disarms* WARMAN.]
Or you're just food for worms
Already; come, you dogs!

PRINCE JOHN

Work round, you three,
Behind him! Drive him out from that damned oak!

ROBIN

Oh, that's a princely speech! Have at you, sir!
[*He strikes* PRINCE JOHN'S *sword out of his hand and turns suddenly to confront the others.* JOHN *picks up a dagger and makes as if to stab* ROBIN *in the back. At the same instant, bugles are heard in the distance. The red-cross knight flashes between the trees and seizing* JOHN'S *arm in his gauntleted hand, disarms him, then turns to help* ROBIN.]

KNIGHT

What, four on one! Down with your blades, you curs,
Or, by Mahound!—
[*The three men take to flight.* JOHN *stands staring at the newcomer. The* FORESTERS *appear, surrounding the glade.*]

JOHN

[*Muttering.*]

What? Thou? Thou? Or his ghost?
No—no—it cannot be.

ROBIN

Let them yelp home,
The pitiful jackals. They have left behind
The prime offender. Ha, there, my merry lads,
All's well; but take this villain into the cave
And guard him there.

[*The* FORESTERS *lead* PRINCE JOHN *into the cave.*]

JOHN

[*To the* FORESTERS.]

Answer me one thing: who
Is yonder red-cross knight?

A FORESTER

No friend of thine,
Whoe'er he be!

KNIGHT

[*To* ROBIN.]

I need not ask *his* name.
I grieve to know it!

ROBIN

Sir, I am much beholden
To your good chivalry. What thanks is mine
To give, is all your own.

KNIGHT

Then I ask this!
Give me that prisoner! I think his life is mine.

ROBIN

You saved my own, and more, you saved much more
Than my poor life is worth. But, sir, think well!
This man is dangerous, not to me alone,
But to the King of England; for he'll yet
Usurp the throne! Think well!

KNIGHT

I ask no more.
I have more reasons than you know.

ROBIN

So be it.
Ho! Bring the prisoner back!
[*The* FORESTERS *bring* PRINCE JOHN *back. He stares at the* KNIGHT *as if in fear.*]
Sir, you shall judge him.
This prisoner is your own.

KNIGHT

Then—let him go!

FORESTERS

What! Set him free?

ROBIN

Obey!
[*They release* PRINCE JOHN.]

KNIGHT

Out of my sight;
Go!

PRINCE JOHN

What man is this?

KNIGHT

Quickly, get thee gone!
[PRINCE JOHN *goes out, shaken and white.*]

ROBIN

We'll think no more of him! It is our rule
That whomsoe'er we meet in merry greenwood
Should dine with us. Will you not be our guest?

KNIGHT

That's a most happy thought! I have not heard
A merrier word than dinner all this day.
I am well-nigh starved.

ROBIN

Will you not raise your visor
And let us know to whose good knightly hand
We are so beholden?

KNIGHT

Sir, you will pardon me,
If, for a little, I remain unknown.
But, tell me, are you not that Robin Hood
Who breaks the forest laws?

ROBIN

That is my name.
We hold this earth as naturally our own
As the glad common air we breathe. We think
No man, no king, can so usurp the world
As not to give us room to live free lives,
But, if you shrink from eating the King's deer—

KNIGHT

Shrink? Ha! ha! ha! I count it as my own!
[*The* FORESTERS *appear, preparing the dinner on a table of green turfs, beneath a spreading oak.* MARIAN *and* JENNY *appear at the door of the hut.* JENNY *goes across to help at the preparations for dinner.*]

ROBIN

Ah, there's my Lady Marian! Will you not come
And speak with her?
[*He and the* KNIGHT *go and talk to* MARIAN *in the background.*]

LITTLE JOHN

[*At the table.*]

The trenchers all are set;
Manchets of wheat, cream, curds and honey-cakes,
Venison pasties, roasted pigeons! Much,
Run to the cave; we'll broach our rarest wine
To-day. Old Much is waiting for thee there
To help him. He is growling roundly, too,
At thy delay.

MUCH

[*Going towards the cave.*]
Ah me, my poor old father!

JENNY

I've dressed the salt and strawed the dining hall
With flowers.
[*Enter* FRIAR TUCK *with several more* FORESTERS *and* WILL SCARLET.]

ROBIN

Ah, good Will Scarlet, here at last!

FRIAR TUCK

We should ha' been here sooner; but these others
Borrowed a farmer's market cart and galloped
Ahead of us!

ROBIN

Thy mother is in the hut,
Sheer broken down with hope and fearfulness,
Waiting and trembling for thee, Will. Go in,
Put thy big arm around her.
[WILL SCARLET *goes into the hut with a cry.*]

SCARLET

Mother!

FRIAR TUCK

You see,
My sons, you couldn't expect the lad to run!
There is a certain looseness in the limbs,
A quaking of the flesh that overcomes
The bravest who has felt a hangman's rope
Cuddling his neck.

ROBIN

You judge him by the rope
That cuddles your slim waist! Oh, you sweet armful,
Sit down and pant! I warrant you were glad
To bear him company.

FRIAR TUCK

I'll not deny it!
I am a man of solids. Like the Church,
I am founded on a rock.
[*He sits down.*]

ROBIN

Solids, i' faith!
Sir, it is true he is partly based on beef;
He grapples with it squarely; but fluids, too,
Have played their part in that cathedral choir
He calls his throat. One godless virtue, sir,
They seem to have given him. Never a nightingale
Gurgles jug! jug! in mellower tones than he
When jugs are flowing. Never a thrush can pipe
Sweet, sweet, so rarely as, when a pipe of wine
Summers his throttle, we'll make him sing to us
One of his heathen ditties—*The Malmsey Butt*,
Or *Down the Merry Red Lane!*

FRIAR TUCK

Oh, ay, you laugh,
But, though I cannot run, when I am rested
I'll challenge you, Robin, to a game of buffets,
One fair, square, stand-up, stand-still, knock-down blow
Apiece; you'll need no more. If you not kiss
The turf, at my first clout, I will forego
Malmsey for ever!

ROBIN

Friar, I recant;
You're champion there. Fists of a common size
I will encounter; but not whirling hams
Like thine!

FRIAR TUCK

I knew it!

JENNY

[*Approaching.*]
Please you, sirs, all is ready!

FRIAR TUCK

Ah, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, that's good news!

[WILL SCARLET *comes out of the hut with his arm round his mother. They all sit down at the table of turfs. Enter* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *timidly.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is there a place for me?

A FORESTER

Ay, come along!

FRIAR TUCK

Now, Robin, don't forget the grace, my son.

ROBIN

[*Standing up.*]

It is our custom, sir, since our repast
Is borrowed from the King, to drain one cup
To him, and his return from the Crusade,
Before we dine. That same wine-bibbing friar
Calls it our 'grace'; and constitutes himself
Remembrancer—without a cause, for never
Have we forgotten, never while bugles ring
Thro' Sherwood, shall forget—Outlaws, the King!

[*All stand up except the* KNIGHT.]

CRIES

The King and his return from the Crusade!

[*They drink and resume their seats.*]

ROBIN

You did not drink the health, sir Knight. I hope
You hold with Lion-Heart.

KNIGHT

Yes; I hold with him.
You were too quick for me. I had not drawn
These gauntlets off.

But tell me, Lady Marian,
When is your bridal day with Robin Hood?

MARIAN

We shall be wedded when the King comes home
From the Crusade.

KNIGHT

Ah, when the King comes home!
That's music—all the birds of April sing
In those four words for me—the King comes home.

MARIAN

I am glad you love him, sir.

ROBIN

But you're not eating!
Your helmet's locked and barred! Will you not raise
Your visor?

KNIGHT

[*Laughs.*]

Ha! ha! ha! You see I am trapped!
I did not wish to raise it! Hunger and thirst
Break down all masks and all disguises, Robin.
[*He rises and removes his helmet, revealing the face of* RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.]

ROBIN

The King!

[*They all leap to their feet.*]

OUTLAWS

The King! The King!

ROBIN

But oh, my liege,
I should have known, when we were hard beset
Around Will Scarlet by their swarming bands,
And when you rode out of the Eastern sky
And hurled our foemen down, I should have known
It was the King come home from the Crusade!

And when I was beset here in the wood
By treacherous hands again, I should have known
Whose armour suddenly burned between the leaves!
I should have known, either it was St. George
Or else the King come home from the Crusade!

RICHARD

Indeed there is one thing that might have told you,
Robin—a lover's instinct, since it seems
So much for you and Marian depends
On my return.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Sire, you will pardon me,
For I am only a fool, and yet methinks
You know not half the meaning of those words—
The King, the King comes home from the Crusade!
Thrust up your swords, heft uppermost, my lads,
And shout—the King comes home from the Crusade.
[*He leaps on a seat, and thrusts up the King's sword, heft uppermost, as if it were a cross.*]

ROBIN

Pardon him, sire, poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf has lost
His wits!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

That's what Titania said you'd say,
Poor sweet bells out of tune! But oh, don't leave,
Don't leave the forest! There's darker things to come!
Don't leave the forest! I have wits enough at least
To wrap my legs around my neck for warmth
On winter nights.

RICHARD

Well, you've no need to pass
The winter in these woods—

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oh, not *that* winter!

ROBIN

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, be silent!
[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *goes aside and throws himself down sobbing among the ferns.*]

RICHARD

When even your cave
Methinks can scarce be cheery. Huntingdon,
Your earldom we restore to you this day!
You and my Lady Marian shall return
To Court with us, where your true bridal troth
Shall be fulfilled with golden marriage bells.
Now, friends, the venison pasty! We must hear
The Malmsey Butt and *Down the Merry Red Lane,*
Ere we set out, at dawn, for London Town.

ROBIN

Allan-a-dale shall touch a golden string
To speed our feast, sire, for he soars above
The gross needs of the Churchman!

RICHARD

Allan-a-Dale?

WILL SCARLET

Our greenwood minstrel, sire! His harp is ours
Because we won his bride for him.

RICHARD

His bride?

REYNOLD GREENLEAF

Was to be wedded, sire, against her will
Last May, to a rich old baron.

RICHARD

Pigeon-pie—
And Malmsey—yes—a rich old baron—tell!

ROBIN

Sire, on the wedding day, my merry men
Crowded the aisles with uninvited guests;
And, as the old man drew forth the golden ring,
They threw aside their cloaks with one great shout
Of 'Sherwood'; and, for all its crimson panes,
The church was one wild sea of Lincoln green!
The Forest had broken in, sire, and the bride
Like a wild rose tossing on those green boughs,
Was borne away and wedded here by Tuck
To her true lover; and so—his harp is ours.

ALLAN-A-DALE

No feasting song, sire, but the royal theme
Of chivalry—a song I made last night
In yonder ruined chapel. It is called
The Old Knight's Vigil.

RICHARD

Our hearts will keep it young!

[ALLAN-A-DALE *sings*, SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *raises his head among the ferns.*]

[*Song.*]

I

Once, in this chapel, Lord
  Young and undaunted,
Over my virgin sword
  Lightly I chaunted,—
"Dawn ends my watch. I go
Shining to meet the foe!"

II

"Swift with thy dawn," I said,
  "Set the lists ringing!
Soon shall thy foe be sped,
  And the world singing!
Bless my bright plume for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *rises to his knees amongst the ferns.*]

III

"War-worn I kneel to-night,
Lord, by Thine altar!
Oh, in to-morrow's fight,
Let me not falter!
Bless my dark arms for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.

IV

"Keep Thou my broken sword
All the long night through
While I keep watch and ward!
Then—the red fight through,
Bless the wrenched haft for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.

V

"Keep, in thy piercèd hands,
Still the bruised helmet:
Let not their hostile bands
Wholly o'erwhelm it!
Bless my poor shield for me,
Christ, King of Chivalry.

VI

"Keep Thou the sullied mail,
Lord, that I tender
Here, at Thine altar-rail!
Then—let Thy splendour
Touch it once . . . and I go
Stainless to meet the foe."

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *rises to his feet and takes a step towards the minstrel.*]

[*Curtain.*]

ACT IV

SCENE I. *Garden of the King's Palace. Enter* JOHN *and* ELINOR.

ELINOR

You will be king the sooner! Not a month
In England, and my good son Lion-Heart
Must wander over-seas again. These two,
Huntingdon and his bride, must bless the star
Of errant knighthood.

JOHN

He stayed just long enough
To let them pass one fearless honeymoon
In the broad sunlight of his royal favour,
Then, like a meteor off goes great King Richard,
And leaves them but the shadow of his name
To shelter them from my revenge. They know it!
I have seen her shiver like a startled fawn
And draw him closer, damn him, as I passed.

ELINOR

They would have flitted to the woods again
But for my Lord Fitzwalter.

JOHN

That old fool
Has wits enough to know I shall be king,
And for his land's sake cheats himself to play
Sir Pandarus of Troy. "'Tis wrong, dear daughter,
To think such evil." Pah, he makes me sick!

ELINOR

Better to laugh. He is useful.

JOHN

If I were king!

If Richard were to perish over-seas!
I'd—

ELINOR

You'd be king the sooner. Never fear:
These wandering meteors flash into their graves
Like lightning, and no thunder follows them
To warn their foolish henchmen.

JOHN

[*Looking at her searchingly.*]

Shall I risk
The King's return?

ELINOR

What do you mean?

JOHN

I mean
I cannot wait and watch this Robin Hood
Dangle the fruit of Tantalus before me,
Then eat it in my sight! I have borne enough!
He gave me like a fairing to my brother
In Sherwood Forest; and I now must watch him,
A happy bridegroom with the happy bride,
Whose lips I meant for mine.

ELINOR

And do you think
I love to see it?

JOHN

Had it not been for you
He would have died ere this!

ELINOR

Then let him die!

JOHN

Oh, ay, but do you mean it, mother?

ELINOR

God,
I hate him, hate him!

JOHN

Mother, he goes at noon
To Sherwood Forest, with a bag of gold
For some of his old followers. If, by chance
He fall—how saith the Scripture?—among thieves
And vanish—is not heard of any more,
I think Suspicion scarce could lift her head
Among these roses here to hiss at me,
When Lion-Heart returns.

ELINOR

Vanish?

JOHN

I would not
Kill him too quickly. I would have him taken
To a dungeon that I know.

ELINOR

You have laid your trap
Already? Tell me. You need not be afraid!
I saw them kiss, in the garden, yesternight;
And I have wondered, ever since, if fire
Could make a brand quite hot enough to stamp
My hate upon him.

JOHN

Well, then, I will tell you—
The plan is laid; and, if his bag of gold
Rejoice one serf to-day, then I'll resign
Maid Marian to his loving arms for ever.
But you must help me, mother, or she'll suspect.
Do not let slip your mask of friendliness,
As I have feared. Look—there our lovers come
Beneath that arch of roses. Look, look, mother,
They are taking leave of one another now,
A ghastly parting, for he will be gone
Well nigh four hours, they think. To look at them,
One might suppose they knew it was for ever.

ELINOR

Come, or my hate will show itself in my face:
I must not see them.
[*Exeunt* PRINCE *and* ELINOR. *A pause. Enter* ROBIN HOOD *and* MARIAN.]

ROBIN

So, good-bye, once more,
Sweetheart.

MARIAN

Four hours; how shall I pass the time?
Four hours, four ages, you will scarce be home
By dusk; how shall I pass it?

ROBIN

You've to think
What robe to wear at the great masque to-night
And then to don it. When you've done all that
I shall be home again.

MARIAN

What, not before?

ROBIN

That's not unlikely, either.

MARIAN

Now you mock me,
But you'll be back before the masque begins.

ROBIN

I warrant you I will.

MARIAN

It is a month
To-day since we were married. Did you know it?
Fie, I believe you had forgotten, Robin.

ROBIN

I had, almost. If marriage make the moons
Fly, as this month has flown, we shall be old
And grey in our graves before we know it.
I wish that we could chain old Father Time.

MARIAN

And break his glass into ten thousand pieces.

ROBIN

And drown his cruel scythe ten fathom deep,
Under the bright blue sea whence Love was born:

MARIAN

Ah, but we have not parted all this month
More than a garden's breadth, an arrow's flight:
Time will be dead till you come back again.
Four hours of absence make four centuries!
Do you remember how the song goes, Robin,
That bids true lovers not to grieve at parting
Often? for Nature gently severs them thus,
Training them up with kind and tender art,
For the great day when they must part for ever.

ROBIN

Do you believe it, Marian?

MARIAN

No; for love
Buried beneath the dust of life and death,
Would wait for centuries of centuries,
Ages of ages, until God remembered,
And, through that perishing cloud-wrack, face looked up
Once more to loving face.

ROBIN

Your hope—and mine!
Is not a man's poor memory, indeed,
A daily resurrection? Your hope—and mine!

MARIAN

And all the world's at heart! I do believe it.

ROBIN

And I—if only that so many souls
Like yours have died believing they should meet
Again, lovers and children, little children!
God will not break that trust. I have found my heaven
Again in you; and, though I stumble still,
Your small hand leads me thro' the darkness, up
And onward, to the heights I dared not see,
And dare not even now; but my head bows
Above your face; I see them in your eyes.
Love, point me onward still!

[*He takes her in his arms.*]

Good-bye! Good-bye!

MARIAN

Come back, come back, before the masque begins!

ROBIN

Ay, or a little later—never fear:
You'll not so easily lose me.

MARIAN

I shall count
The minutes!

ROBIN

Why, you're trembling!

MARIAN

Yes, I am foolish.
This is the first small parting we have had;
But—you'll be back ere dusk?

ROBIN

[*Laughing.*]

Ah, do you think
That chains of steel could hold me, sweet, from you,
With those two heavenly eyes to call me home,
Those lips to welcome me? Good-bye!

MARIAN

Good-bye!

[*He goes hurriedly out. She looks after him for a moment, then suddenly calls.*]

Robin! Ah, well, no matter now—too late!

[*She stands looking after him.*]

SCENE II. *Sherwood Forest: dusk. Outside the cave, as in the second act.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *runs quickly across the glade, followed by* PUCK.

PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf! Shadow-of-a-Leaf!
Don't dance away like that; don't hop; don't skip
Like that, I tell you! I'll never do it again,
I promise. Don't be silly now! Come here;
I want to tell you something. Ah, that's right.
Come, sit down here upon this bank of thyme
"While I thine amiable ears"—Oh, no,
Forgive me, ha! ha! ha!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Now, Master Puck,
You'll kindly keep your word! A foxglove spray
In the right hand is deadlier than the sword
That mortals use, and one resounding thwack
Applied to your slim fairyhood's green limbs
Will make it painful, painful, very painful,
Next time your worship wishes to sit down
Cross-legged upon a mushroom.

PUCK

Ha! ha! ha!
Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

You keep your word, that's all!

PUCK

Haven't I kept my word? Wasn't it I
That made you what these poor, dull mortals call
Crazy? Who crowned you with the cap and bells?
Who made you such a hopeless, glorious fool
That wise men are afraid of every word
You utter? Wasn't it I that made you free
Of fairyland—that showed you how to pluck
Fern-seed by moonlight, and to walk and talk
Between the lights, with urchins and with elves?
Is there another fool twixt earth and heaven
Like you—ungrateful rogue—answer me that!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

All true, dear gossip, and for saving me
From the poor game of blind man's buff men call
Wisdom, I thank you; but to hang and buzz
Like a mad dragon-fly, now on my nose,
Now on my neck, now singing in my ears,
Is that to make me free of fairyland?
No—that's enough to make the poor fool mad
And take to human wisdom.

PUCK

Yet you love me,
Ha! ha!—you love me more than all the rest.
You can't deny it! You can't deny it! Ha! ha!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I won't deny it, gossip. E'en as I think
There must be something loves us creatures, Puck,
More than the Churchmen say. We are so teased
With thorns, bullied with briars, baffled with stars.

I've lain sometimes and laughed until I cried
To see the round moon rising o'er these trees
With that same foolish face of heavenly mirth
Winking at lovers in the blue-bell glade.

PUCK

Lovers! Ha! ha! I caught a pair of 'em
Last night, behind the ruined chapel! Lovers!
O Lord, these mortals, they'll be the death of me!
Hist, who comes here?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Scarlet and Little John,
And all the merry men—not half so merry
Since Robin went away. He was to come
And judge between the rich and poor to-day,
I think he has forgotten.

PUCK

Hist, let me hide
Behind this hawthorn bush till they are gone.
[*Enter the* FORESTERS—*they all go into the cave except* SCARLET *and* LITTLE JOHN, *who stand at the entrance, looking anxiously back.*]

LITTLE JOHN

I have never known the time when Robin Hood
Said "I will surely come," and hath not been
Punctual as yonder evening star.

SCARLET

Pray God
No harm hath fallen him. Indeed he said,
"Count on my coming."

LITTLE JOHN

I'll sound yet one more call.
They say these Courts will spoil a forester.
It may be he has missed the way. I'd give
My sword-hand just to hear his jolly bugle
Answer me.

[*He blows a forest call. They listen. All is silent.*]

SCARLET

Silence—only the sough of leaves!

LITTLE JOHN

Well, I'm for sleep: the moon is not so bright
Since Robin left us.

SCARLET

Ha! Shadow-of-a-Leaf, alone?
I thought I heard thy voice.

LITTLE JOHN

Oh, he will talk
With ferns and flowers and whisper to the mice!
Perfectly happy, art thou not, dear fool?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Perfectly happy since I lost my wits!

SCARLET

Pray that thou never dost regain them, then,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I thank you kindly, sir,
And pray that you may quickly lose your own,
And so be happy, too. Robin's away,
But, if you'd lost your wits, you would not grieve.

SCARLET

Good-night, good fool.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

I will not say "Good-night,"
Wise man, for I am crazed, and so I know
'Tis good, and yet you'll grieve. I wish you both
A bad night that will tease your wits away
And make you happy.

The OUTLAWS *enter the cave.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *beckons to* PUCK, *who steals out again.*]

PUCK

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, some change
Is creeping o'er the forest. I myself
Scarce laugh so much since Robin went away!
Oh, my head hangs as heavily as a violet
Brimmed with the rain. Shadow-of-a-Leaf, a cloud,
A whisper steals across this listening wood!
I am growing afraid. Dear fool, I am thy Puck,
But I am growing afraid there comes an end
To all our Sherwood revels, and I shall never
Tease thee again.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Here comes the King!

[*Enter* OBERON.]

Hail, Oberon.
King of the fairies, I strew ferns before you.
There are no palms here: ferns do just as well!

OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf, our battles all are wasted;
Our fairy dreams whereby we strove to warn
Robin and Marian, wasted. Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Dear Robin Hood, the lover of the poor,
And kind Maid Marian, our forest queen,
Are in the toils at last!

[*He pauses.*]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Speak, speak!

OBERON

Prince John
Hath trapped and taken Robin.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Is not Richard
King of this England? Did not Richard tempt
Robin, for Marian's sake, to leave the forest?
Did he not swear upon the Holy Cross
That Robin should be Earl of Huntingdon
And hold his lands in safety?

OBERON

Only fear
Of Richard held the wicked Prince in leash.
But Richard roamed abroad again. Prince John
Would murder Robin secretly.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Wise men
Fight too much for these holy sepulchres!
Are not the living images of God
Better than empty graves?

OBERON

One grave is filled
Now; for our fairy couriers have brought
Tidings that Richard Lion-Heart is dead.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Dead?

OBERON

Dead! In a few brief hours the news will reach
The wicked Prince. He will be King of England,
With Marian in his power!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

No way to save them!

OBERON

We cannot break our fairy vows of silence.
A mortal, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, can break those vows,
But only on pain of death.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Oberon, I,
Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the fool, must break my vows!
I must save Robin Hood that he may save
Marian from worse than death.

OBERON

Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Think what death means to you, never to join
Our happy sports again, never to see
The moonlight streaming through these ancient oaks
Again, never to pass the fairy gates
Again. We cannot help it. They will close
Like iron in your face, and you will hear
Our happy songs within; but you will lie
Alone, without, dying, and never a word
To comfort you, no hand to touch your brow.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

So be it. I shall see them entering in!
The time is brief. Quick, tell me, where is Robin?
Quick, or the news that makes Prince John a king
Will ruin all.

OBERON

Robin is even now
Thrust in the great dark tower beyond the wood,
The topmost cell where foot can never climb.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Cannot an arrow reach it? Ay, be swift;
Come, lead me thither.

OBERON

I cannot disobey
The word that kills the seed to raise the wheat,
The word that—Shadow-of-a-Leaf, I think I know
Now, why great kings ride out to the Crusade.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Quickly, come, quickly!

[*Exeunt* OBERON *and* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF. PUCK *remains staring after them, then vanishes with a sob, between the trees.* LITTLE JOHN *and* SCARLET *appear once more at the mouth of the cave.*]

SCARLET

I thought I heard a voice.

LITTLE JOHN

'Twas only Shadow-of-a-Leaf again. He talks
For hours among the ferns, plays with the flowers,
And whispers to the mice, perfectly happy!

SCARLET

I cannot rest for thinking that some harm
Hath chanced to Robin. Call him yet once more.

[LITTLE JOHN *blows his bugle. All is silent. They stand listening.*]

SCENE III. *A gloomy cell.* ROBIN *bound.* PRINCE JOHN *and two mercenaries. A low narrow door in the background, small barred window on the left.*

PRINCE JOHN

[*To the Mercenaries.*]

Leave us a moment. I have private matters
To lay before this friend of all the poor.
You may begin to build the door up now,
So that you do not wall me in with him.

[*The two men begin filling up the doorway with rude blocks of masonry.*]

So now, my good green foot-pad, you are trapped
At last, trapped in the practice of your trade!
Trapped, as you took your stolen Norman gold
To what was it—a widow, or Saxon serf
With eye put out for breaking forest laws?
You hold with them, it seems. Your dainty soul
Sickens at our gross penalties; and so
We'll not inflict them on your noble self,
Although we have the power. There's not a soul
Can ever tell where Robin Hood is gone.
These walls will never echo it.
[*He taps the wall with his sword.*]
And yet
There surely must be finer ways to torture
So fine a soul as yours. Was it not you
Who gave me like a fairing to my brother
With lofty condescension in your eyes;
And shall I call my mercenaries in
And bid them burn your eyes out with hot irons?
Richard is gone—he'll never hear of it!
An Earl that plays the robber disappears,
That's all. Most like he died in some low scuffle
Out in the greenwood. I am half inclined
To call for red-hot irons after all,
So that your sympathy with Saxon churls
May be more deep, you understand; and then
It would be sweet for you, alone and blind,
To know that you could never in this life
See Marian's face again. But no—that's bad,
Bad art to put hope's eyes out. It destroys
Half a man's fear to rob him of his hope.
No; you shall drink the dregs of it. Hope shall die
More exquisite a death. Robin, my friend,
You understand that, when I quit your presence,
This bare blank cell becomes your living tomb.
Do you not comprehend? It's none so hard.
The doorway will be built up. There will be
No door, you understand, but just a wall,
Some six feet thick, of solid masonry.
Nobody will disturb you, even to bring
Water or food. You'll starve—see—like a rat,

Bricked up and buried. But you'll have time to think
Of how I tread a measure at the masque
To-night, with Marian, while her wide eyes wonder
Where Robin is—and old Fitzwalter smiles
And bids his girl be gracious to the Prince
For his land's sake. Ah, ha! you wince at that!
Will you not speak a word before I go?
Speak, damn you!
[*He strikes* ROBIN *across the face with his glove.* ROBIN *remains silent.*]
Six days hence, if you keep watch
At yonder window (you'll be hungry then)
You may catch sight of Marian and Prince John
Wandering into the gardens down below.
You will be hungry then; perhaps you'll strive
To call to us, or stretch a meagre arm
Through those strong bars; but then you know the height
Is very great—no voice can reach to the earth:
This is the topmost cell in my Dark Tower.
Men look like ants below there. I shall say
To Marian, See that creature waving there
High up above us, level with the clouds,
Is it not like a winter-shrivelled fly?
And she will laugh; and I will pluck her roses.
And then—and then—there are a hundred ways,
You know, to touch a woman's blood with thoughts
Beyond its lawful limits. Ha! ha! ha!
By God, you almost spoke to me, I think.
Touches at twilight, whispers in the dark,
Sweet sympathetic murmurs o'er the loss
Of her so thoughtless Robin, do you think
Maid Marian will be quite so hard to win
When princes come to woo? There will be none
To interrupt us then. Time will be mine
To practise all the amorous arts of Ovid,
And, at the last—

ROBIN

Will you not free my hands?
You have your sword. But I would like to fight you
Here, with my naked hands. I want no more.

PRINCE JOHN

Ha! ha! At last the sullen speaks.
That's all
I wanted. I have struck you in the face.
Is't not enough? You can't repay that blow.

ROBIN

Bury me down in hell and I'll repay it
The day you die, across your lying mouth
That spoke of my true lady, I will repay it,
Before the face of God!

PRINCE JOHN

[*Laughing.*]

Meanwhile, for me
Till you repay that blow, there is the mouth
Of Marian, the sweet honey-making mouth
That shall forestall your phantom blow with balm.
Oh, you'll go mad too soon if I delay.
I am glad you spoke. Farewell, the masons wait.
And I must not be late for Marian.

[*Exit thro' the small aperture now left in the doorway. It is rapidly closed and sounds of heavy masonry being piled against it are heard.* ROBIN *tries to free his hands and after an effort, succeeds. He hurls himself against the doorway, and finds it hopeless. He turns to the window, peers through it for a moment, then suddenly unwinds a scarf from his neck, ties it to one of the bars and stands to one side.*]

ROBIN

Too high a shot for most of my good bowmen!
What's that? A miss?

[*He looks thro' the window.*]

Good lad, he'll try again!

[*He stands at the side once more and an arrow comes thro' the window.*]

Why, that's like magic!

[*He pulls up the thread attached to it.*]

Softly; or 'twill break!—
Ah, now 'tis sturdy cord.
—I'll make it fast.
But, how to break these bars!
St. Nicholas,
There's someone climbing. He must have a head
Of iron, and the lightness of a cat!
Downward is bad enough, but up is more
Than mortal! Who the devil can it be?
Thank God, it's growing dark. But what a risk!
None of my merry men could e'en attempt it.
I'm very sure it can't be Little John.
What, Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *appears at the window.*]

'Fore God, dear faithful fool,
I am glad to see you.

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Softly, gossip, softly,
Pull up the rope a little until we break
This bar away—or some kind friend may see
The dangling end below. Now here's a toothpick,
Six inches of grey steel, for you to work with,
And here's another for me. Pick out the mortar!

[*They work to loosen the bars.*]

Wait! Here's a rose I brought you in my cap
And here's a spray of fern! Old Nature's keys
Open all prisons, I'll throw them in for luck,
[*He throws them into the cell and begins working feverishly again.*]
So that the princes of the world may know
The forest let you out. Down there on earth,
If any sees me, they will only think
The creepers are in leaf. Pick out the mortar!
That's how the greenwood works. You know, 'twill thrust
Its tendrils through these big grey stones one day
And pull them down. I noticed in the courtyard
The grass is creeping though the crevices
Already, and yellow dandelions crouch
In all the crumbling corners. Pick it out!
This is a very righteous work indeed

For men in Lincoln green; for what are we
But tendrils of old Nature, herald sprays!
We scarce anticipate. Pick the mortar out.
Quick, there's no time to lose, although to-night
We're in advance of sun and moon and stars
And all the trickling sands in Time's turned glass.
[*With a sudden cry.*]
Richard is dead!

ROBIN

Richard is dead! The King
Is dead!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Ah, dead! Come, pick the mortar out,
Out of the walls of towers and shrines and tombs!
For now Prince John is King, and Lady Marian
In peril, gossip! Yet we are in advance
Of sun and moon to-night, for sweet Prince John
Is not aware yet of his kinglihood,
Or of his brother's death.

ROBIN

[*Pausing a moment.*]
Why, Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
What does this mean?

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Come, pick the mortar out;
You have no time to lose. This very night
My Lady Marian must away to Sherwood.
At any moment the dread word may come
That makes John King of England. Quick, be quick!

ROBIN

She is at the masque to-night!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

Then you must mask
And fetch her thence! Ah, ha, the bar works loose.
Pull it!

[*They pull at the bar, get it free, and throw it into the cell.*]

Now, master, follow me down the rope.

[*Exit* ROBIN *thro' the window.*]

SCENE IV. *Night. The garden of the King's palace (as before), but lighted with torches for the masque. Music swells up and dies away continually. Maskers pass to and fro between the palace and the garden. On the broad terrace in front some of them are dancing a galliard.*

[PRINCE JOHN *enters and is met by* QUEEN ELINOR, *neither of them masked.*]

ELINOR

All safe?

PRINCE JOHN

Ay, buried and bricked up now, to think
Alone, in the black night, of all I told him.
Thank God, we have heard the last of Robin Hood.

ELINOR

[*She puts on her mask.*]

You are sure?

PRINCE JOHN

I saw him entombed with my own eyes!
Six feet of solid masonry. Look there,
There's the young knight you've lately made your own.
Where is my Lady Marian? Ah, I see her!
With that old hypocrite, Fitzwalter.

[*They part.* PRINCE JOHN *puts on his mask as he goes.*]

A LADY

But tell me
Where is Prince John?

A MASKER

That burly-shouldered man
By yonder pillar, talking with old Fitzwalter,
And the masked girl, in green, with red-gold hair,
Is Lady Marian!

THE LADY

Where is Robin Hood?
I have never seen him, but from all one hears
He is a wood-god and a young Apollo,
And a more chaste Actæon all in one.

MASKER

Oh, ay, he never watched Diana bathing,
Or, if he did, all Sherwood winked at it.
Who knows? Do you believe a man and maid
Can sleep out in the woods all night, as these
Have slept a hundred times, and put to shame
Our first poor parents; throw the apple aside
And float out of their leafy Paradise
Like angels?

LADY

No; I fear the forest boughs
Could tell sad tales. Oh, I imagine it—
Married to Robin, by a fat hedge-priest
Under an altar of hawthorn, with a choir
Of sparrows, and a spray of cuckoo-spit
For holy water! Oh, the modest chime
Of blue-bells from a fairy belfry, a veil
Of evening mist, a robe of golden hair;
A blade of grass for a ring; a band of thieves
In Lincoln green to witness the sweet bans;
A glow-worm for a nuptial taper, a bed
Of rose-leaves, and wild thyme and wood-doves' down.

Quick! Draw the bridal curtains—three tall ferns—
Across the cave mouth, lest a star should peep
And make the wild rose leap into her face!
Pish! A sweet maid! But where is Robin Hood?

MASKER

I know not; but he'd better have a care
Of Mistress Marian. If I know Prince John
He has marked her for his own.

LADY

I cannot see
What fascinates him.

MASKER

No, you are right, nor I.

PRINCE JOHN

Come, Lady Marian, let me lead you out
To tread a measure.

MARIAN

Pray, sir, pardon me!
I am tired.

FITZWALTER

[*Whispering angrily to her.*]
Now, Marian, be not so ungracious.
You both abuse him and disparage us.
His courtiers led the ladies they did choose.
Do not displease him, girl. I pray you, go!
Dance out your galliard. God's dear holy-bread,
Y'are too forgetful. Dance, or by my troth,
You'll move my patience. I say you do us wrong.

MARIAN

I will do what you will. Lead, lead your dance.
[*Exeunt* JOHN *and* MARIAN.]

FIRST MASKER

[*To a lady, as they come up from the garden.*]
Will you not let me see your face now, sweet?

LADY

You hurt my lip with that last kiss of yours.
Hush, do not lean your face so close, I pray you;
Loosen my fingers. There's my lord.

FIRST MASKER

Where? Where?
Now, if I know him, I shall know your name!

LADY

That tall man with the damozel in red.

FIRST MASKER

Oh, never fear him. He, too, wore a mask!
I saw them—

[*They pass out talking.*]

SECOND MASKER

[*Looking after them.*]
Saw you those two turtle-doves!

SECOND LADY

Yes.

SECOND MASKER

Come with me, I'll show you where I caught them
Among the roses, half an hour ago.
[*They laugh and exeunt into the gardens. The music swells up and more dancers appear.*]
[*Enter* ROBIN HOOD, *still in his forester's garb, but wearing a mask. He walks as if wounded and in pain. He sits down in the shadow of a pillar watching, and partly concealed from the throng.*]

THIRD LADY

Remember now to say you did not see me
Here at the masque.

THIRD MASKER

Or shall I say that I
Was out in Palestine?

[*They pass. Enter little* ARTHUR PLANTAGENET. *He comes up to* ROBIN HOOD.]

ARTHUR

Are you not Robin Hood?

ROBIN

Hush, Arthur. Don't you see I wear a mask
Like all the rest to-night?

ARTHUR

Why do they wear
Masks?

ROBIN

They must always wear some sort of mask
At court. Sometimes they wear them all their lives.

ARTHUR

You are jesting, Robin. Now I wanted you
To tell me tales of Sherwood. Tell me how
You saved Will Scarlet.

ROBIN

Why, I've told you that
A score of times.

ARTHUR

I know, I want to hear it
Again. Well, tell me of that afternoon
When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.
I have often thought of that. It must have been
Splendid! You weren't expecting it at all?

ROBIN

No, not at all; but, Arthur, tell me first
Have you seen Lady Marian?

ARTHUR

Yes, I saw her
Treading a measure with my Uncle John!

ROBIN

Stand where you are and watch; and, if you see her,
Beckon her. Then I'll tell you how the King
Came home from the Crusade.

ARTHUR

First, let me tell you
Just how I think it was. It must have been
Like a great picture. All your outlaws there
Sitting around your throne of turf, and you
Judging the rich and poor. That's how it was
Last night, I dreamed of it; and you were taking
The baron's gold and giving it to the halt
And blind; and then there was a great big light
Between the trees, as if a star had come
Down to the earth and caught among the boughs,
With beams like big soft swords amongst the ferns
And leaves, and through the light a mighty steed
Stepped, and the King came home from the Crusade.
Was it like that? Was there a shining light?

ROBIN

I think there must have been, a blinding light.

ARTHUR

Filling an arch of leaves?

ROBIN

Yes!

ARTHUR

That was it!
That's how the King came home from the Crusade.

ROBIN

But there—you've told the story!

ARTHUR

Ah, not all!

ROBIN

No, not quite all. What's that?
[*The music suddenly stops. The maskers crowd together whispering excitedly.*]

ARTHUR

Why have they stopped
The music? Ah, there's Hubert. Shall I ask him?

ROBIN

Yes, quickly, and come back!
[ARTHUR *runs up to a masker. Several go by hurriedly.*]

FIRST MASKER

The King is dead!

SECOND MASKER

Where did it happen? France?

FIRST MASKER

I know not, sir!

[ARTHUR *returns.*]

ARTHUR

Robin, they say the King is dead! So John
Is king now, is he not?

ROBIN

Ay, John is king!
Now, tell me quickly, use your eyes, my boy,
Where's Lady Marian?

ARTHUR

Ah, there she is at last,
Alone!

ROBIN

Go to her quickly, and bring her hither.
[ARTHUR *runs off and returns with* MARIAN.]

MARIAN

Robin, thank God, you have returned. I feared—

ROBIN

No more, dear heart, you must away to Sherwood!
Shadow-of-a-Leaf is waiting by the orchard
With your white palfrey. Away, or the new king
Will hunt us down. I'll try to gain you time.
Go—quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, your face is white, you are wounded!
What's this—there's blood upon your doublet!
Robin!

ROBIN

Nothing! Go, quickly!

MARIAN

Robin, I cannot leave you.

ROBIN

Go, Marian. If you ever loved me, go.

MARIAN

You'll follow?

ROBIN

Oh, with my last breath I will,
God helping me; but I must gain you time!
Quickly! Here comes the King!

MARIAN

Oh, follow soon!

[*Exit.*]

[ROBIN *sits down again, steadying himself against the pillar.* JOHN *appears at the doors of the palace, above the terrace, a scroll in his hand.*]

JOHN

My friends, the King is dead!

MASKERS

[*Taking off their masks, with a cry.*]

Long live King John!

JOHN

[*Coming down amongst them.*]

Our masque is ended by this grievous news;
But where's my Lady Marian? I had some word
To speak with her! Not here! Why—

ROBIN

[*Still masked, rises and confronts the King, who stares at him and shrinks back a little.*]

All the masks
Are off, sire! No, perhaps they wear them still.

JOHN

Who is this?

ROBIN

One that was dead and lives. You say
Your brother, the great King, is dead. Oh, sire,
If that be so, you'll hear a dead man speak,

For your dead brother's sake. You say the King
Is dead; but you are king. So the King lives!
You are King of England now from sea to sea,
Is it not so? Shout, maskers, once again,
Long live the King!

MASKERS

Long live the King!

ROBIN

You see
What power is yours! Your smile is life, your frown
Death. At a word from you the solid earth
Would shake with tramp of armies. You can call
Thousands to throw away their lives like straws
Upon your side, if any foreign king
Dare to affront you.
[*He draws nearer to John, who still shrinks a little, as if in fear.*]
Richard, you say, is dead,
And yet, O King, I say that the great King
Lives!
[*He strikes* JOHN *across the face.* JOHN *cowers and staggers back. The* MASKERS *draw their swords, the women scream and rush together.* ROBIN *turns, sword in hand, to confront the* MASKERS.]
Back, fools; for I say that the great King
Lives. Do not doubt it. Ye have dreamed him dead
How often. Hark, God in heaven, ye know that voice.
[*A voice is heard drawing nearer thro' the distant darkness of the garden, singing. All listen.* JOHN'S *face whitens.*]

[*Song.*]

Knight, on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
"Onward," I heard him say,
"Love, to thy side."

ROBIN

'Tis Blondel! Still vaunt-courier to the King,
As when he burst the bonds of Austria! Listen!

[*Song nearer.*]
"Nay," sang a bird above,
"Stay, for I see
Death, in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee."

MASKERS

[*Resuming their masks and muttering to one another.*]
Can the King live? Is this John's treachery? Look,
He is crushed with fear!

ROBIN

Listen! I'll go to meet him.
[*Exit into the garden.*]

MASKERS

It was the song of Blondel! The same song
He made with Richard, long since!—
Blondel's voice!
Just as we heard it on that summer's night
When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.

[*The Song still drawing nearer.*]
"Death! What is Death?" he cried.
"I must ride on,
On to my true love's side,
Up to her throne!"
[*Enter* BLONDEL, *from the garden. He stands, startled by the scene before him.*]

MASKERS

Blondel! Where is the King? Where is the King?

BLONDEL

Did ye not know?—Richard, the King, is dead!

MASKERS

Dead!

JOHN

Dead! And ye let the living dog escape
That dared snarl at our sovereignty. I know him,
Risen from the dead or not. I know 'twas he,
'Twas Robin Hood! After him; hunt him down!
Let him not live to greet another sun.
After him!

MASKERS

[Drawing their swords and plunging into the darkness.]
After him; hunt the villain down!

[Curtain.]

ACT V

SCENE I. *Morning. Sherwood Forest (as before).*
LITTLE JOHN *and some of the* OUTLAWS *are gathered together talking. Occasionally they look anxiously toward the cave and at the approaches through the wood. Enter two* FORESTERS, *running and breathless.*

FIRST FORESTER

The King's men! They are scouring thro' the wood,
Two troops of them, five hundred men in each
And more are following.

SECOND FORESTER

We must away from here
And quickly.

LITTLE JOHN

Where did you sight them?

SECOND FORESTER

From the old elm,
Our watch-tower. They were not five miles away!

FIRST FORESTER

Five, about five. We saw the sunlight flash
Along, at least five hundred men at arms;
And, to the north, along another line,
Bigger, I think; but not so near.

SECOND FORESTER

Where's Robin?
We must away at once!

FIRST FORESTER

No time to lose!

LITTLE JOHN

His wound is bitter—I know not if we dare
Move him!

FIRST FORESTER

His wound?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, some damned arrow pierced him
When he escaped last night from the Dark Tower.
He never spoke of it when first he reached us;
And, suddenly, he swooned. He is asleep
Now. He must not be wakened. They will take
Some time yet ere they thread our forest-maze.

FIRST FORESTER

Not long, by God, not long. They are moving fast.
[MARIAN *appears at the mouth of the cave. All turn to look at her, expectantly. She seems in distress.*]

MARIAN

He is tossing to and fro. I think his wound
Has taken fever! What can we do?

FRIAR TUCK

I've sent
A messenger to Kirklee Priory,
Where my old friend the Prioress hath store
Of balms and simples, and hath often helped
A wounded forester. Could we take him there,
Her skill would quickly heal him.

LITTLE JOHN

The time is pressing!

FRIAR TUCK

The lad will not be long!
[ROBIN *appears tottering and white at the mouth of the cave.*]

MARIAN

[*Running to him.*]
O Robin, Robin,
You must not rise! Your wound!

ROBIN

[*He speaks feverishly.*]
Where can I rest
Better than on my greenwood throne of turf?
Friar, I heard them say they had some prisoners.
Bring them before me.

FRIAR TUCK

Master, you are fevered,
And they can wait.

ROBIN

Yes, yes; but there are some
That cannot wait, that die for want of food,
And then—the Norman gold will come too late,
Too late.

LITTLE JOHN

O master, you must rest.
[*Going up to him.*]

MARIAN

Oh, help me,
Help me with him. Help me to lead him back.

ROBIN

No! No! You must not touch me! I will rest
When I have seen the prisoners, not before.

LITTLE JOHN

He means it, mistress, better humour him
Or he will break his wound afresh.

MARIAN

O Robin,
Give me your word that you'll go back and rest,
When you have seen them.

ROBIN

Yes, I will try, I will try!
But oh, the sunlight! Where better, sweet, than this?

[*She leads him to the throne of turf and he sits down upon it, with* MARIAN *at his side.*]

The Friar is right. This life is wine, red wine,
Under the greenwood boughs! Oh, still to keep it,
One little glen of justice in the midst
Of multitudinous wrong. Who knows? We yet
May leaven the whole world.

[*Enter the* OUTLAWS, *with several prisoners, among them, a* KNIGHT, *an* ABBOT, *and a* FORESTER.]

These are the prisoners?
You had some victims of the forest laws
That came to you for help. Bring them in, too,
And set them over against these lords of the earth!

[*Some ragged women and children appear. Several serfs with iron collars round their necks and their eyes put out, are led gently in.*]

Is that our Lincoln green among the prisoners?
There? One of my own band?

LITTLE JOHN

Ay, more's the pity!
We took him out of pity, and he has wronged
Our honour, sir; he has wronged a helpless woman
Entrusted to his guidance thro' the forest.

ROBIN

Ever the same, the danger comes from those
We fight for, those below, not those above!
Which of you will betray me to the King?

THE FORESTER

Do you ask *me*, sir?

ROBIN

Judas answered first,
With "Master, is it I?" Hang not thy head!
What say'st thou to this charge?

THE FORESTER

Why, Friar Tuck
Can answer for me. Do you think he cares
Less for a woman's lips than I?

FRIAR TUCK

Cares less,
Thou rotten radish? Nay, but a vast deal more!
God's three best gifts to man,—woman and song
And wine, what dost *thou* know of all their joy?
Thou lean pick-purse of kisses?

ROBIN

Take him out,
Friar, and let him pack his goods and go,
Whither he will. I trust the knave to thee
And thy good quarter-staff, for some five minutes
Before he says "Farewell."

FRIAR

Bring him along,
Give him a quarter-staff, I'll thrash him roundly.
[*He goes out. Two of the* FORESTERS *follow with the prisoner. Others bring the* ABBOT *before* ROBIN.]

ROBIN

Ah! Ha! I know him, the godly usurer
Of York!

LITTLE JOHN

We saw a woman beg for alms,
One of the sufferers by the rule which gave
This portly Norman his fat priory
And his abundant lands. We heard him say
That he was helpless, had not one poor coin
To give her, not a scrap of bread! He wears
Purple beneath his cloak: his fine sleek palfrey
Flaunted an Emperor's trappings!

ABBOT

Man, the Church
Must keep her dignity!

ROBIN

[*Pointing to the poor woman, etc.*]
Ay, look at it!
There is your dignity! And you must wear
Silk next your skin to show it. But there was one
You call your Master, and He had not where
To lay His head, save one of these same trees!

ABBOT

Do you blaspheme! I pray you, let me go!
There are grave matters waiting. I am poor!

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

ABBOT

[*Hurriedly.*]

I have five marks
In all the world, no more. I'll give them to you!

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

[*They pour a heap of gold out of his purse.*]

ROBIN

Five marks, indeed!
Here's, at the least, a hundred marks in gold!

ABBOT

That is my fees, my fees; you must not take them!

ROBIN

The ancient miracle!—five loaves, two small fishes;
And then—of what remained—they gathered up
Twelve basketsful!

ABBOT

Oh, you blaspheming villains!

ROBIN

Abbot, I chance to know how this was wrought,
This miracle; wrought with the blood, anguish and sweat
Of toiling peasants, while the cobwebs clustered
Around your lordly cellars of red wine.
Give him his five and let him go.

ABBOT

[*Going out.*]

The King
Shall hear of this! The King will hunt you down!

ROBIN

And now —the next!

SCARLET

Beseech you, sir, to rest,
Your wound will—

ROBIN

No! The next, show me the next!

SCARLET

This Norman baron—

ROBIN

What, another friend!
Another master of broad territories.
How many homes were burned to make you lord
Of half a shire? What hath he in his purse?

SCARLET

Gold and to spare!

BARON

To keep up mine estate
I need much more.

ROBIN

[*Pointing to the poor.*]
Ay, you need these! these! these!

BARON

[*Protesting.*]
I am not rich.

ROBIN

Look in his purse and see.

BARON

You dogs, the King shall hear of it!

ROBIN

[*Murmuring as if to himself.*]

Five loaves!
And yet, of what remained, they gathered up
Twelve basketsful. The bread of human kindness
Goes far! Oh, I begin to see new meanings
In that old miracle! How much? How much?

SCARLET

Five hundred marks in gold!

ROBIN

[*Half rising and speaking with a sudden passion.*]

His churls are starving,
Starving! Their little children cry for bread!
One of those jewels on his baldric there
Would feed them all in plenty all their lives!
Five loaves—and yet—and yet—of what remained,
The fragments, mark you, twelve great basketsful!

BARON

I am in a madman's power! The man is mad!

ROBIN

Take all he has, all you can get. To-night,
When all is dark (we must have darkness, mind,
For deeds like this) blind creatures will creep out
With groping hands and gaping mouths, lean arms,
And shrivelled bodies, branded, fettered, lame,
Distorted, horrible; and they will weep
Great tears like gouts of blood upon our feet,
And we shall succour them and make them think
(That's if you have not mangled their poor souls
As well, or burned their children with their homes),
We'll try to make them think that some few roods
Of earth are not so bitter as hell might be.
Are you not glad to think of this? Nay—go—
Or else your face will haunt me when I die!
Take him quickly away. The next! The next!
O God!

[*Flings up his arms and falls fainting.*]

MARIAN

[*Bending over him.*]

O Robin! Robin! Help him quickly.
The wound! The wound!

[*They gather round* ROBIN. *The* OUTLAWS *come back with the captive* FORESTER, *his pack upon his back.*]

FRIAR TUCK

[*To the* FORESTER.]

Now, get you gone and quickly!
What, what hath happened?

[FRIAR TUCK *and the* OUTLAWS *join the throng round* ROBIN. *The* FORESTER *shakes his fist at them and goes across the glade muttering. The* MESSENGER *from Kirklee Priory comes out of the forest at the same moment and speaks to him, not knowing of his dismissal.*]

MESSENGER

All's well! Robin can come
To Kirklee. Our old friend the Prioress
Is there, and faithful! They've all balms and simples
To heal a wound.

FORESTER

[*Staring at him.*]

To Kirklee?

MESSENGER

Yes, at sunset,
We'll take him to the borders of the wood
All will be safe.
Where he can steal in easily, alone.

FORESTER

The King's men are at hand!

MESSENGER

Oh, but if we can leave him there, all's safe;
We'll dodge the King's men.

FORESTER

When is he to go?

MESSENGER

Almost at once; but he must not steal in
Till sundown, when the nuns are all in chapel.
How now? What's this? What's this?

[*He goes across to the throng round* ROBIN.]

FORESTER

[*Looking after him.*]

Alone, to Kirklee!

[*Exit.*]

SCENE II. *A room in Kirklee Priory. A window on the right overlooks a cloister leading up to the chapel door. The forest is seen in the distance, the sun beginning to set behind it. The* PRIORESS *and a* NOVICE *are sitting in a window-seat engaged in broidery work.*

NOVICE

He must be a good man—this Robin Hood!
I long to see him. Father used to say
England had known none like him since the days
Of Hereward the Wake.

PRIORESS

He will be here
By vespers. You shall let him in. Who's that?
Can that be he? It is not sundown yet.
See who is there.

[*Exit* NOVICE. *She returns excitedly.*]

NOVICE

A lady asks to see you!
She is robed like any nun and yet she spoke
Like a great lady—one that is used to rule

More than obey; and on her breast I saw
A ruby smouldering like a secret fire
Beneath her cloak. She bade me say she came
On Robin Hood's behest.

PRIORESS

What? Bring her in
Quickly.

[*Exit* NOVICE *and returns with* QUEEN ELINOR *in a nun's garb.*
At the sign from the PRIORESS *the* NOVICE *retires.*]

ELINOR

Madam, I come to beg a favour.
I am a friend of Robin Hood. I have heard—
One of his Foresters, this very noon
Brought me the news—that he is sorely wounded;
And purposes to seek your kindly help
At Kirklee Priory.

PRIORESS

Oh, then indeed,
You must be a great friend, for this was kept
Most secret from all others.

ELINOR

A great friend!
He was my page some fifteen years ago,
And all his life I have watched over him
As if he were my son! I have come to beg
A favour—let me see him when he comes.
My husband was a soldier, and I am skilled
In wounds. In Palestine I saved his life
When every leech despaired of it, a wound
Caused by a poisoned arrow.

PRIORESS

You shall see him.
I have some skill myself in balms and simples,
But, in these deadlier matters I would fain
Trust to your wider knowledge.

ELINOR

Let me see him alone;
Alone, you understand. His mind is fevered.
I have an influence over him. Do not say
That I am here, or aught that will excite him.
Better say nothing—lead him gently in,
And leave him. In my hands he is like a child.

PRIORESS

It shall be done. I see you are subtly versed
In the poor workings of our mortal minds.

ELINOR

I learnt much from a wise old Eastern leech
When I was out in Palestine.

PRIORESS

I have heard
They have great powers and magic remedies;
They can restore youth to the withered frame.

ELINOR

There is only one thing that they cannot do.

PRIORESS

And what?

ELINOR

They cannot raise the dead.

PRIORESS

Ah, no;
I am most glad to hear you say it, most glad
To know we think alike. That is most true—
Yes—yes—most true; for God alone, dear friend,
Can raise the dead!

[*A bell begins tolling slowly.*]

The bell for even-song!
You have not long to wait.

[*Shadowy figures of nuns pass the windows and enter the chapel. The sunset deepens.*]

Will you not pray
With me?

[*The* PRIORESS *and* QUEEN ELINOR *kneel down together before a little shrine. Enter the* NOVICE.]

NOVICE

There is a forester at the door.
Mother, I think 'tis he!

PRIORESS

[*Rising.*]

Admit him, then.

ELINOR

Leave me: I will keep praying till he comes.

PRIORESS

You are trembling! You are not afraid?

ELINOR

[*With eyes closed as in strenuous devotion.*]

No; no;
Leave me, I am but praying!

[*A chant swells up in the chapel. Exit* PRIORESS. ELINOR *continues muttering as in prayer. Enter* ROBIN HOOD, *steadying himself on his bow, weak and white. She rises and passes between him and the door to confront him.*]

ELINOR

Ah, Robin, you have come to me at last
For healing. Pretty Marian cannot help you
With all her kisses.

ROBIN HOOD

[*Staring at her wildly.*]

You! I did not know
That you were here. I did not ask your help.
I must go—Marian!
[*He tries to reach the door, but reels in a half faint on the way.*
ELINOR *supports him as he pauses, panting for breath.*]

ELINOR

Robin, your heart is hard,
Both to yourself and me. You cannot go,
Rejecting the small help which I can give
As if I were a leper. Ah, come back.
Are you so unforgiving? God forgives!
Did you not see me praying for your sake?
Think, if you think not of yourself, oh, think
Of Marian—can you leave her clinging arms
Yet, for the cold grave, Robin? I have risked
Much, life itself, to bring you help this day!
I have some skill in wounds.
[*She holds him closer and brings her face near to his own, looking into his eyes.*]
Ah, do you know
How slowly, how insidiously this death
Creeps, coil by tightening coil, around a man,
When he is weak as you are? Do you know
How the last subtle coil slips round your throat
And the flat snake-like head lifts up and peers
With cruel eyes of cold, keen inquisition,
Rivetting your own, until the blunt mouth sucks
Your breath out with one long, slow, poisonous kiss?

ROBIN HOOD

O God, that nightmare! Leave me! Let me go!

ELINOR

You stare at me as if you saw that snake.
Ha! Ha! Your nerves are shaken; you are so weak!

You cannot go! What! Fainting? Ah, rest here
Upon this couch.
[*She half supports, half thrusts him back to a couch, in an alcove out of sight and draws a curtain. There is a knock at the door.*]

ELINOR

Who's there?

PRIORESS

Madam, I came
To know if I could help in anything.

ELINOR

Nothing! His blood runs languidly. It needs
The pricking of a vein to make the heart
Beat, and the sluggish rivers flow. I have brought
A lance for it. I'll let a little blood.
Not over-much; enough, enough to set
The pulses throbbing.

PRIORESS

Maid Marian came with him.
She waits without and asks—

ELINOR

Let her not come
Near him till all is done. Let her not know
Anything, or the old fever will awake.
I'll lance his arm now!
[*The* PRIORESS *closes the door.* ELINOR *goes into the alcove. The chant from the chapel swells up again.* QUEEN ELINOR *comes out of the alcove, white and trembling. She speaks in a low whisper as she looks back.*]
Now, trickle down, sweet blood. Grow white, foul lips
That have kissed Marian—yet, she shall not boast
You kissed her last; for I will have you wake
To the fierce memory of this kiss in heaven
Or burn with it in hell;

[*She kneels down as if to kiss the face of* ROBIN, *within. The chant from the chapel swells up more loudly. The door slowly opens.* MARIAN *steals in.* ELINOR *rises and confronts her.*]

ELINOR

[*Laying a hand upon* ROBIN'S *bow beside her.*]

Hush! Do not wake him!

MARIAN

[*In a low voice.*]

What have you done with him?

ELINOR

[*As* MARIAN *advances towards the couch.*]

He is asleep.
Hush! Not a step further! Stay where you are! His life
Hangs on a thread.

MARIAN

Why do you stare upon me?
What have you done? What's this that trickles down—

[*Stoops to the floor and leaps back with a scream.*]

It is blood. You have killed him!

ELINOR

[*Seizes the bow and shoots.* MARIAN *falls.*]

Follow him—down to hell.
King John will find you there.

[*Exit. The scene grows dark.*]

MARIAN

[*Lifts her head with a groan.*]

I am dying, Robin!
O God, I cannot wake him! Robin! Robin!
Give me one word to take into the dark!
He will not wake! He will not wake! O God,
Help him!

[*She falls back unconscious.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, a *green spray in his hand, opens the casement and stands for a moment in the window against the last glow of sunset, then enters and runs to the side of* ROBIN.]

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Hurriedly.*]

Awake, awake, Robin, awake!
The forest waits to help you! All the leaves
Are listening for your bugle. Ah, where is it?
Let but one echo sound and the wild flowers
Will break thro' these grey walls and the green sprays
Drag down these deadly towers. Wake, Robin, wake,
And let the forest drown the priest's grey song
With happy murmurs. Robin, the gates are open
For you and Marian! All I had to give
I have given to thrust them open, the dear gates
Of fairyland which I shall never pass
Again. I can no more, I am but a shadow,
Dying as mortals die! It is not I
That calls, not I, but Marian. Hear her voice!
Robin, awake!
O, master mine, farewell!

[*Exit lingeringly through the casement.*]

ROBIN

[ROBIN *is dimly seen in the mouth of the alcove. He stretches out his hands blindly in the dark.*]

Marian! Why do you call to me in dreams?
Why do you call me? I must go. What's this?
Help me, kind God, for I must say one word,
Only one word—good-bye—to Marian,
To Marian—Ah, too weak, too weak!

[*He sees the dark body of* MARIAN *and utters a cry, falling on his knees beside her.*]

O God,
Marian! Marian!
My bugle! Ah, my bugle!

[*He rises to his feet and, drowning the distant organ-music, he blows a resounding forest-call. It is answered by several in the forest. He falls on his knees by* MARIAN *and takes her in his arms.*]

O Marian, Marian, who hath used thee so?

MARIAN

Robin, it is my death-wound. Ah, come close.

ROBIN

Marian, Marian, what have they done to thee?

[*The* OUTLAWS *are heard thundering at the gates with cries.*]

OUTLAWS

Robin! Robin! Robin! Break down the doors.

[*The terrified nuns stream past the window, out of the chapel. The* OUTLAWS *rush into the room. The scene still darkens.*]

SCARLET

Robin and Marian!

LITTLE JOHN

Christ, what devil's hand
Hath played the butcher here? Quick, hunt them down,
They passed out yonder. Let them not outlive
Our murdered king and queen.

REYNOLD GREENLEAF

O Robin, Robin,
Who shot this bitter shaft into her breast?

[*Several stoop and kneel by the two lovers.*]

ROBIN HOOD

Speak to me, Marian, speak to me, only speak!
Just one small word, one little loving word
Like those—do you remember?—you have breathed
So many a time and often, against my cheek,

Under the boughs of Sherwood, in the dark
At night, with nothing but the boughs and stars
Between us and the dear God up in heaven!
O God, why does a man's heart take so long
To break? It would break sooner if you spoke
A word to me, a word, one small kind word.

MARIAN

Sweetheart!

ROBIN

Sweetheart! You have broken it, broken it! Oh, kind,
Kind heart of Marian!

MARIAN

Robin, come soon!
[*Dies.*]

ROBIN

Soon, sweetheart! Oh, her sweet brave soul is gone!
Marian, I follow quickly!

SCARLET

God, Kirklee

Shall burn for this!

LITTLE JOHN

Kirklee shall burn for this!
O master, master, you shall be avenged!

ROBIN

No; let me stand upright! Your hand, good Scarlet!
We have lived our lives and God be thanked we go
Together thro' this darkness. We shall wake
Please God, together. It is growing darker!
I cannot see your faces. Give me my bow
Quickly into my hands, for my strength fails
And I must shoot one last shaft on the trail
Of yonder setting sun, never to reach it!

But where this last, last bolt of all my strength,
My hope, my love, shall fall, there bury us both,
Together, and tread the green turf over us!
The bow!

[SCARLET *hands him his bow. He stands against the faint glow of the window, draws the bow to full length, shoots and falls back into the arms of* LITTLE JOHN.]

LITTLE JOHN

[*Laying him down.*]

Weep, England, for thine outlawed lover,
Dear Robin Hood, the poor man's friend, is dead.

[*The scene becomes quite dark. Then out of the darkness, and as if at a distance, the voice of* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *is heard singing the fairy song of the first scene. The fairy glade in Sherwood begins to be visible in the gloom by the soft light of the ivory gates which are swinging open once more among the ferns. As the scene grows clearer the song of* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *grows more and more triumphant and is gradually caught up by the chorus of the fairy host within the woods.*]

[*Song of* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.]

I

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The world begins again!
And O, the red of the roses,
And the rush of the healing rain!

II

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The Princess wakes from sleep;
For the soft green keys of the wood-land
Have opened her donjon-keep!

III

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
Their grey walls hemmed us round;
But, under my greenwood oceans,
Their castles are trampled and drowned.

IV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
My green sprays climbed on high,
And the ivy laid hold on their turrets
And haled them down from the sky!

V

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
They were strong! They are overthrown!
For the little soft hands of the wild-flowers
Have broken them, stone by stone.

VI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
Though Robin lie dead, lie dead,
And the green turf by Kirklee
Lie light over Marian's head,

VII

Green ferns on the crimson sky-line,
What bugle have you heard?
Was it only the peal of the blue-bells,
Was it only the call of a bird?

VIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The rose o'er the fortalice floats!
My nightingales chant in their chapels,
My lilies have bridged their moats!

IX

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
King Death, in the light of the sun,
Shrinks like an elfin shadow!
His reign is over and done!

X

The hawthorn whitens the wood-land;
My lovers, awake, awake,
Shake off the grass-green coverlet,
Glide, bare-foot, thro' the brake!

XI

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
And, under the great green boughs,
I have found out a place for my lovers,
I have built them a beautiful house.

XII

Green ferns in the dawn-red dew-fall,
This gift by my death I give,—
They shall wander immortal thro' Sherwood!
In my great green house they shall live!

XIII

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
When the first wind blows from the South,
They shall meet by the Gates of Faërie!
She shall set her mouth to his mouth!

XIV

He shall gather her, fold her and keep her;
They shall pass thro' the Gates, they shall live!
For the Forest, the Forest has conquered!
This gift by my death I give!

XV

The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered! The Forest has conquered!
The world awakes anew;
And O, the scent of the hawthorn,
And the drip of the healing dew!

[*The song ceases.* TITANIA *and* OBERON *come out into the moon-lit glade.*]

OBERON

Yet one night more the gates of fairyland
Are opened by a mortal's kindly deed.
But Robin Hood and Marian now are driven
As we shall soon be driven, from the world
Of cruel mortals.

TITANIA

Mortals call them dead;
Oberon, what is death?

OBERON

Only a sleep.
But these may dream their happy dreams in death
Before they wake to that new lovely life
Beyond the shadows; for poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf
Has given them this by love's eternal law
Of sacrifice, and they shall enter in
To dream their lover's dream in fairyland.

TITANIA

And Shadow-of-a-Leaf?

OBERON

He cannot enter now.
The gates are closed against him.

TITANIA

But is this
For ever?

OBERON

We fairies have not known or heard
What waits for those who, like this wandering Fool,
Throw all away for love. But I have heard
There is a great King, out beyond the world,
Not Richard, who is dead, nor yet King John;
But a great King who one day will come home
Clothed with the clouds of heaven from His Crusade.

TITANIA

The great King!

OBERON

Hush, the poor dark mortals come!

[*The crowd of serfs, old men, poor women, and children, begin to enter as the fairy song swells up within the gates again.* ROBIN *and* MARIAN *are led along by a crowd of fairies at the end of the procession.*]

TITANIA

And there, see, there come Robin and his bride.
And the fairies lead them on, strewing their path
With ferns and moon-flowers. See, they have entered in!

[*The last fairy vanishes thro' the gates.*]

OBERON

And we must follow, for the gates may close
For ever now. Hundreds of years may pass
Before another mortal gives his life
To help the poor and needy.

[OBERON *and* TITANIA *follow hand in hand thro' the gates. They begin to close.* SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *steals wistfully and hesitatingly across, as if to enter. They close in his face. He goes up to them and leans against them sobbing, a small green figure, looking like a greenwood spray against their soft ivory glow. The*

fairy music dies. He sinks to his knees and holds up his hands. Immediately a voice is heard singing and drawing nearer thro' the forest.]

[*Song—drawing nearer.*]
Knight on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
"Onward," I heard him say,
"Love, to thy side!"

"Nay," sang a bird above,
"Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love
Waiting for thee."

[*Enter* BLONDEL, *leading a great white steed. He stops and looks at the kneeling figure.*]

BLONDEL

Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*Rising to his feet.*]
Blondel!

BLONDEL

I go to seek
My King!

SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF

[*In passionate grief.*]
The King is dead!

BLONDEL

[*In yet more passionate joy and triumph.*]
The great King lives!
[*Then more tenderly.*]
Will you not come and look for Him with me?

[*They go slowly together through the forest and are lost to sight.* BLONDEL'S *voice is heard singing the third stanza of the song in the distance, further and further away.*]

"Death? What is Death?" he cried.
"I must ride on!"

[*Curtain.*]

TALES OF THE MERMAID TAVERN

I

A KNIGHT OF THE OCEAN-SEA

Under that foggy sunset London glowed,
Like one huge cob-webbed flagon of old wine.
And, as I walked down Fleet Street, the soft sky
Flowed thro' the roaring thoroughfares, transfused
Their hard sharp outlines, blurred the throngs of black
On either pavement, blurred the rolling stream
Of red and yellow busses, till the town
Turned to a golden suburb of the clouds.
And, round that mighty bubble of St. Paul's,
Over the up-turned faces of the street,
An air-ship slowly sailed, with whirring fans,
A voyager in the new-found realms of gold,
A shadowy silken chrysalis whence should break
What radiant wings in centuries to be.

So, wandering on, while all the shores of Time
Softened into Eternity, it seemed
A dead man touched me with his living hand,
A flaming legend passed me in the streets
Of London—laugh who will—that City of Clouds,
Where what a dreamer yet, in spite of all,
Is man, that splendid visionary child
Who sent his fairy beacon through the dusk,
On a blue bus before the moon was risen,—
This Night, at eight, The Tempest!

Dreaming thus,
(Small wonder that my footsteps went astray!)
I found myself within a narrow street,
Alone. There was no rumour, near or far,
Of the long tides of traffic. In my doubt
I turned and knocked upon an old inn-door,

Hard by, an ancient inn of mullioned panes,
And crazy beams and over-hanging eaves:
And, as I knocked, the slowly changing west
Seemed to change all the world with it and leave
Only that old inn steadfast and unchanged,
A rock in the rich-coloured tides of time.

And, suddenly, as a song that wholly escapes
Remembrance, at one note, wholly returns,
There, as I knocked, memory returned to me.
I knew it all—the little twisted street,
The rough wet cobbles gleaming, far away,
Like opals, where it ended on the sky;
And, overhead, the darkly smiling face
Of that old wizard inn; I knew by rote
The smooth sun-bubbles in the worn green paint
Upon the doors and shutters.

There was one
Myself had idly scratched away one dawn,
One mad May-dawn, three hundred years ago,
When out of the woods we came with hawthorn boughs
And found the doors locked, as they seemed to-night.
Three hundred years ago—nay, Time was dead!
No need to scan the sign-board any more
Where that white-breasted siren of the sea
Curled her moon-silvered tail among such rocks
As never in the merriest seaman's tale
Broke the blue-bliss of fabulous lagoons
Beyond the Spanish Main.

And, through the dream,
Even as I stood and listened, came a sound
Of clashing wine-cups: then a deep-voiced song
Made the old timbers of the Mermaid Inn
Shake as a galleon shakes in a gale of wind
When she rolls glorying through the Ocean-sea.

SONG

I

Marchaunt Adventurers, chanting at the windlass,
  Early in the morning, we slipped from Plymouth Sound,
All for Adventure in the great New Regions,
  All for Eldorado and to sail the world around!
Sing! the red of sun-rise ripples round the bows again.
  Marchaunt Adventurers, O sing, we're outward bound,
All to stuff the sunset in our old black galleon,
  All to seek the merchandise that no man ever found.

Chorus: Marchaunt Adventurers!
Marchaunt Adventurers!

  Marchaunt Adventurers, O, whither are ye bound?—
All for Eldorado and the great new Sky-line,
  All to seek the merchandise that no man ever found.

II

Marchaunt Adventurers, O, what'ull ye bring home again?—
  Wonders and works and the thunder of the sea!
Whom will ye traffic with?—The King of the Sunset!
  What shall be your pilot then?—A wind from Galilee.
Nay, but ye be marchaunts, will ye come back empty-handed?—
  Ay, we be marchaunts, though our gain we ne'er shall see.
Cast we now our bread upon the waste wild waters.
  After many days, it shall return with usury.

Chorus: Marchaunt Adventurers!
Marchaunt Adventurers!

  What shall be your profit in the mighty days to be?—
Englande!—Englande!—Englande!—Englande!—
  Glory everlasting and the lordship of the sea!

And there, framed in the lilac patch of sky
That ended the steep street, dark on its light,
And standing on those glistering cobblestones
Just where they took the sunset's kiss, I saw
A figure like foot-feathered Mercury,
Tall, straight and splendid as a sunset-cloud.

Clad in a crimson doublet and trunk-hose,
A rapier at his side; and, as he paused,
His long fantastic shadow swayed and swept
Against my feet.
A moment he looked back,
Then swaggered down as if he owned a world
Which had forgotten—did I wake or dream?—
Even his gracious ghost!
Over his arm
He swung a gorgeous murrey-coloured cloak
Of Ciprus velvet, caked and smeared with mud
As on the day when—did I dream or wake?
And had not all this happened once before?—
When he had laid that cloak before the feet
Of Gloriana! By that mud-stained cloak,
'Twas he! Our Ocean-Shepherd! Walter Raleigh!
He brushed me passing, and with one vigorous thrust
Opened the door and entered. At his heels
I followed—into the Mermaid!—through three yards
Of pitch-black gloom, then into an old inn-parlour
Swimming with faces in a mist of smoke
That up-curled, blue, from long Winchester pipes,
While—like some rare old picture, in a dream
Recalled—quietly listening, laughing, watching,
Pale on that old black oaken wainscot floated
One bearded oval face, young, with deep eyes,
Whom Raleigh hailed as "Will!"
But as I stared
A sudden buffet from a brawny hand
Made all my senses swim, and the room rang
With laughter as upon the rush-strewn floor
My feet slipped and I fell. Then a gruff voice
Growled over me—"Get up now, John-a-dreams,
Or else mine host must find another drawer!
Hast thou not heard us calling all this while?"
And, as I scrambled up, the rafters rang
With cries of "Sack! Bring me a cup of sack!
Canary! Sack! Malmsey! and Muscadel!"
I understood and flew. I was awake,
A leather-jerkined pot-boy to these gods,
A prentice Ganymede to the Mermaid Inn!

There, flitting to and fro with cups of wine,
I heard them toss the Chrysomelan names
From mouth to mouth—Lyly and Peele and Lodge,
Kit Marlowe, Michael Drayton, and the rest,
With Ben, rare Ben, brick-layer Ben, who rolled
Like a great galleon on his ingle-bench.
Some twenty years of age he seemed; and yet
This young Gargantua with the bull-dog jaws,
The T, for Tyburn, branded on his thumb,
And grim pock-pitted face, was growling tales
To Dekker that would fright a buccaneer,—
How in the fierce Low Countries he had killed
His man, and won that scar on his bronzed fist;
Was taken prisoner, and turned Catholick;
And, now returned to London, was resolved
To blast away the vapours of the town
With Boreas-throated plays of thunderous mirth.
"I'll thwack their Tribulation-Wholesomes, lad,
Their Yellow-faced Envies and lean Thorns-i'-the-Flesh,
At the *Black-friars Theatre*, or *The Rose*,
Or else *The Curtain*. Failing these, I'll find
Some good square inn-yard with wide galleries,
And windows level with the stage. 'Twill serve
My Comedy of Vapours; though, I grant,
For Tragedy a private House is best,
Or, just as Burbage tip-toes to a deed
Of blood, or, over your stable's black half-door,
Marked *Battlements* in white chalk, your breathless David
Glowers at the whiter Bathsheba within,
Some humorous coach-horse neighs a 'hallelujah'!
And the pit splits its doublets. Over goes
The whole damned apple-barrel, and the yard
Is all one rough and tumble, scramble and scratch
Of prentices, green madams, and cut-purses
For half-chewed Norfolk pippins. Never mind!
We'll build the perfect stage in Shoreditch yet.
And Will, there, hath half promised I shall write
A piece for his own company! What d'ye think
Of *Venus and Adonis*, his first heir,
Printed last week? A bouncing boy, my lad!
And he's at work on a Midsummer's Dream
That turns the world to fairyland!"

All these
And many more were there, and all were young!
There, as I brimmed their cups, I heard the voice
Of Raleigh ringing across the smoke-wreathed room,—
"Ben, could you put a frigate on the stage,
I've found a tragedy for you. Have you heard
The true tale of Sir Humphrey Gilbert?"
"No!"

"Why, Ben, of all the tragical affairs
Of the Ocean-sea, and of that other Ocean
Where all men sail so blindly, and misjudge
Their friends, their charts, their storms, their stars, their God,
If there be truth in the blind crowder's song
I bought in Bread Street for a penny, this
Is the brief type and chronicle of them all.
Listen!" Then Raleigh sent these rugged rhymes
Of some blind crowder rolling in great waves
Of passion across the gloom. At each refrain
He sank his voice to a broad deep undertone,
As if the distant roar of breaking surf
Or the low thunder of eternal tides
Filled up the pauses of the nearer storm,
Storm against storm, a soul against the sea:—

A KNIGHT OF THE OCEAN-SEA

Sir Humphrey Gilbert, hard of hand,
  Knight-in-chief of the Ocean-sea,
Gazed from the rocks of his New Found Land
  And thought of the home where his heart would be.

He gazed across the wintry waste
  That weltered and hissed like molten lead,—
"He saileth twice who saileth in haste!
I'll wait the favour of Spring," he said.

Ever the more, ever the more,
He heard the winds and the waves roar!
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.

The yellow clots of foam went by
  Like shavings that curl from a ship-wright's plane,
Clinging and flying, afar and nigh,
  Shuddering, flying and clinging again.

A thousand bubbles in every one
  Shifted and shimmered with rainbow gleams;
But—had they been planets and stars that spun
  He had let them drift by his feet like dreams:

Heavy of heart was our Admirall,
  For, out of his ships—and they were but three!—
He had lost the fairest and most tall,
  And—he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

Ever the more, ever the more,
He heard the winds and the waves roar!
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.

Heavy of heart, heavy of heart,
  For she was a galleon mighty as May,
And the storm that ripped her glory apart
  Had stripped his soul for the winter's way;

And he was aware of a whisper blown
  From foc'sle to poop, from windward to lee,
That the fault was his, and his alone,
  And—he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

"Had he done that! Had he done this!"
  And yet his mariners loved him well;
But an idle word is hard to miss,
  And the foam hides more than the deep can tell.

And the deep had buried his best-loved books,
  With many a hard-worn chart and plan:
And a king that is conquered must see strange looks,
  So bitter a thing is the heart of man!

And—"Who will you find to pay your debt?
For a venture like this is a costly thing!
Will they stake yet more, tho' your heart be set
On the mightier voyage you planned for the Spring?"

He raised his head like a Viking crowned,—
"I'll take my old flag to her Majestie,
And she will lend me ten thousand pound
To make her Queen of the Ocean-sea!"

Ever the more, ever the more,
He heard the winds and the waves roar!
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.

Outside—they heard the great winds blow!
Outside—the blustering surf they heard,
And the bravest there would ha' blenched to know
That they must be taken at their own word.

For the great grim waves were as molten lead
—And he had two ships who sailed with three!—
"And I sail not home till the Spring," he said,
"They are all too frail for the Ocean-sea."

But the trumpeter thought of an ale-house bench,
And the cabin-boy longed for a Devonshire lane,
And the gunner remembered a green-gowned wench,
And the fos'cle whisper went round again,—

"Sir Humphrey Gilbert is hard of hand,
But his courage went down with the ship, may-be,
And we wait for the Spring in a desert land,
For—*he is afraid of the Ocean-sea.*"

Ever the more, ever the more,
He heard the winds and the waves roar!
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.

He knew, he knew how the whisper went!
  He knew he must master it, last or first!
He knew not how much or how little it meant;
  But his heart was heavy and like to burst.

"Up with your sails, my sea-dogs all!
  The wind has veered! And my ships," quoth he,
"They will serve for a British Admirall
  Who is Knight-in-chief of the Ocean-sea!"

His will was like a North-east wind
  That swept along our helmless crew;
But he would not stay on the *Golden Hynde*,
  For that was the stronger ship of the two.

"My little ship's-company, lads, hath passed
  Perils and storms a-many with me!
Would ye have me forsake them at the last?
  They'll need a Knight of the Ocean-sea!"

Ever the more, ever the more,
We heard the winds and the waves roar!
Thunder on thunder shook the shore.

Beyond Cape Race, the pale sun splashed
  The grim grey waves with silver light
Where, ever in front, his frigate crashed
  Eastward, for England and the night.

And still as the dark began to fall,
  Ever in front of us, running free,
We saw the sails of our Admirall
Leading us home through the Ocean-sea.

Ever the more, ever the more,
We heard the winds and the waves roar!
But he sailed on, sailed on before.

On Monday, at noon of the third fierce day
A-board our *Golden Hynde* he came,
With a trail of blood, marking his way
On the salt wet decks as he walked half-lame.

For a rusty nail thro' his foot had pierced.
"Come, master-surgeon, mend it for me;
Though I would it were changed for the nails that amerced
The dying thief upon Calvary."

The surgeon bathed and bound his foot,
And the master entreated him sore to stay;
But roughly he pulled on his great sea-boot
With—"The wind is rising and I must away!"

I know not why so little a thing,
When into his pinnace we helped him down,
Should make our eyelids prick and sting
As the salt spray were into them blown,

But he called as he went—"Keep watch and steer
By my lanthorn at night!" Then he waved his hand
With a kinglier watch-word, "We are as near
To heaven, my lads, by sea as by land!"

Ever the more, ever the more,
We heard the gathering tempest roar!
But he sailed on, sailed on before.

Three hundred leagues on our homeward road,
We strove to signal him, swooping nigh,
That he would ease his decks of their load
Of nettings and fights and artillery.

And dark and dark that night 'gan fall,
And high the muttering breakers swelled,
Till that strange fire which seamen call
"Castor and Pollux," we beheld,

An evil sign of peril and death,
  Burning pale on the high main-mast;
But calm with the might of Gennesareth
  Our Admirall's voice went ringing past.

Clear thro' the thunders, far and clear,
  Mighty to counsel, clear to command,
Joyfully ringing, "We are as near
  To heaven, my lads, by sea as by land!"

Ever the more, ever the more,
We heard the rising hurricane roar!
But he sailed on, sailed on before.

And over us fled the fleet of the stars,
  And, ever in front of us, far or nigh,
The lanthorn on his cross-tree spars
  Dipped to the Pit or soared to the Sky!

'Twould sweep to the lights of Charles's Wain,
  As the hills of the deep 'ud mount and flee,
Then swoop down vanishing cliffs again
  To the thundering gulfs of the Ocean-sea.

We saw it shine as it swooped from the height,
  With ruining breakers on every hand,
Then—a cry came out of the black mid-night,
  As near to heaven by sea as by land!

And the light was out! Like a wind-blown spark,
  All in a moment! And we—and we—
Prayed for his soul as we swept thro' the dark;
For he was a Knight of the Ocean-sea.

Over our fleets for evermore
The winds 'ull triumph and the waves roar!
But he sails on, sails on before!

Silence a moment held the Mermaid Inn,
Then Michael Drayton, raising a cup of wine,
Stood up and said,—"Since many have obtained
Absolute glory that have done great deeds,
But fortune is not in the power of man,
So they that, truly attempting, nobly fail,
Deserve great honour of the common-wealth.
Such glory did the Greeks and Romans give
To those that in great enterprises fell
Seeking the true commodity of their country
And profit to all mankind; for, though they failed,
Being by war, death, or some other chance,
Hindered, their images were set up in brass,
Marble and silver, gold and ivory,
In solemn temples and great palace-halls,
No less to make men emulate their virtues
Than to give honour to their just deserts.
God, from the time that He first made the world,
Hath kept the knowledge of His Ocean-sea
And the huge Æquinoctiall Continents
Reserved unto this day. Wherefore I think
No high exploit of Greece and Rome but seems
A little thing to these Discoveries
Which our adventurous captains even now
Are making, out there, Westward, in the night,
Captains most worthy of commendation,
Hugh Willoughby—God send him home again
Safe to the Mermaid!—and Dick Chauncellor,
That excellent pilot. Doubtless this man, too,
Sir Humphrey Gilbert, was worthy to be made
Knight of the Ocean-sea. I bid you all
Stand up, and drink to his immortal fame!"

II

A COINER OF ANGELS

Some three nights later, thro' the thick brown fog,
A link-boy, dropping flakes of crimson fire,
Flared to the door and, through its glowing frame,

Ben Jonson and Kit Marlowe, arm in arm,
Swaggered into the Mermaid Inn and called
For red-deer pies.
There, as they supped, I caught
Scraps of ambrosial talk concerning Will,
His *Venus and Adonis*.
"Gabriel thought
'Twas wrong to change the old writers and create
A cold Adonis."
—"Laws were made for Will,
Not Will for laws, since first he stole a buck
In Charlecote woods."
—"Where never a buck chewed fern,"
Laughed Kit, "unless it chewed the fern seed, too,
And walked invisible."
"Bring me some wine," called Ben,
And, with his knife thrumming upon the board,
He chanted, while his comrade munched and smiled.

I

Will Shakespeare's out like Robin Hood
With his merry men all in green,
To steal a deer in Charlecote wood
Where never a deer was seen.

II

He's hunted all a night of June,
He's followed a phantom horn,
He's killed a buck by the light of the moon,
Under a fairy thorn.

III

He's carried it home with his merry, merry band,
There never was haunch so fine;
For this buck was born in Elfin-land
And fed upon sops-in-wine.

IV

This buck had browsed on elfin boughs
Of rose-marie and bay,
And he's carried it home to the little white house
Of sweet Anne Hathaway.

V

"The dawn above your thatch is red!
Slip out of your bed, sweet Anne!
I have stolen a fairy buck," he said,
"The first since the world began.

VI

"Roast it on a golden spit,
And see that it do not burn;
For we never shall feather the like of it
Out of the fairy fern."

VII

She scarce had donned her long white gown
And given him kisses four,
When the surly Sheriff of Stratford-town
Knocked at the little green door.

VIII

They have gaoled sweet Will for a poacher;
But squarely he fronts the squire,
With "When did you hear in your woods of a deer?
Was it under a fairy briar?"

IX

Sir Thomas he puffs,—"If God thought good
My water-butt ran with wine,
Or He dropt me a buck in Charlecote wood,
I wot it is mine, not thine!"

X

"If you would eat of elfin meat,"
Says Will, "you must blow up your horn!
Take your bow, and feather the doe
That's under the fairy thorn!

XI

"If you would feast on elfin food,
You've only the way to learn!
Take your bow and feather the doe
That's under the fairy fern!"

XII

They're hunting high, they're hunting low,
They're all away, away,
With horse and hound to feather the doe
That's under the fairy spray!

XIII

Sir Thomas he raged! Sir Thomas he swore!
But all and all in vain;
For there never was deer in his woods before,
And there never would be again!

And, as I brought the wine—"This is my grace,"
Laughed Kit, "Diana grant the jolly buck
That Shakespeare stole were toothsome as this pie."

He suddenly sank his voice,—"Hist, who comes here?
Look—Richard Bame, the Puritan! O, Ben, Ben,
Your Mermaid Inn's the study for the stage,
Your only teacher of exits, entrances,
And all the shifting comedy. Be grave!
Bame is the godliest hypocrite on earth!
Remember I'm an atheist, black as coal.

He has called me Wormall in an anagram.
Help me to bait him; but be very grave.
We'll talk of Venus."
As he whispered thus,
A long white face with small black-beaded eyes
Peered at him through the doorway. All too well,
Afterwards, I recalled that scene, when Bame,
Out of revenge for this same night, I guessed,
Penned his foul tract on Marlowe's tragic fate;
And, twelve months later, I watched our Puritan
Riding to Tyburn in the hangman's cart
For thieving from an old bed-ridden dame
With whom he prayed, at supper-time, on Sundays.

Like a conspirator he sidled in,
Clasping a little pamphlet to his breast,
While, feigning not to see him, Ben began:—

"Will's *Venus and Adonis*, Kit, is rare,
A round, sound, full-blown piece of thorough work,
On a great canvas, coloured like one I saw
In Italy, by one—Titian! None of the toys
Of artistry your lank-haired losels turn,
Your Phyllida—Love-lies-bleeding—Kiss-me-Quicks,
Your fluttering Sighs and Mark-how-I-break-my-beats,
Begotten like this, whenever and how you list,
Your Moths of verse that shrivel in every taper;
But a sound piece of craftsmanship to last
Until the stars are out. 'Tis twice the length
Of Vergil's books—he's listening! Nay, don't look!—
Two hundred solid stanzas, think of that;
But each a square celestial brick of gold
Laid level and splendid. I've laid bricks and know
What thorough work is. If a storm should shake
The Tower of London down, Will's house would stand.
Look at his picture of the stallion,
Nostril to croup, that's thorough finished work!"

"'Twill shock our Tribulation-Wholesomes, Ben!
Think of that kiss of Venus! Deep, sweet, slow,

As the dawn breaking to its perfect flower
And golden moon of bliss; then slow, sweet, deep,
Like a great honeyed sunset it dissolves
Away!"

A hollow groan, like a bass viol,
Resounded thro' the room. Up started Kit
In feigned alarm—"What, Master Richard Bame!
Quick, Ben, the good man's ill. Bring him some wine!
Red wine for Master Bame, the blood of Venus
That stained the rose!"

"White wine for Master Bame,"
Ben echoed, "Juno's cream that" . . . Both at once
They thrust a wine-cup to the sallow lips
And smote him on the back.
"Sirs, you mistake!" coughed Bame, waving his hands
And struggling to his feet,

"Sirs, I have brought
A message from a youth who walked with you
In wantonness, aforetime, and is now
Groaning in sulphurous fires!"

"Kit, that means hell!"
"Yea, sirs, a pamphlet from the pit of hell,
Written by Robert Greene before he died.
Mark what he styles it—*A Groatsworth of Wit Bought with a Million of Repentance!*"

"Ah,
Poor Rob was all his life-time either drunk,
Wenching, or penitent, Ben! Poor lad, he died
Young. Let me see now, Master Bame, you say
Rob Greene wrote this on earth before he died,
And then you printed it yourself in hell!"
"Stay, sir, I came not to this haunt of sin
To make mirth for Beëlzebub!"

"O, Ben,
That's you!"

"'Swounds, sir, am I Beëlzebub?
Ogs-gogs!" roared Ben, his hand upon his hilt!
"Nay, sir, I signified the god of flies!
I spake out of the scriptures!" snuffled Bame
With deprecating eye.

"I come to save
A brand that you have kindled at your fire,
But not yet charred, not yet so far consumed,
One Richard Cholmeley, who declares to all
He was persuaded to turn atheist
By Marlowe's reasoning. I have wrestled with him,
But find him still so constant to your words
That only you can save him from the fire."
"Why, Master Bame," said Kit, "had I the keys
To hell, the damned should all come out and dance
A morrice round the Mermaid Inn to-night."
"Nay, sir, the damned are damned!"
"Come, sit you down!
Take some more wine! You'd have them all be damned
Except Dick Cholmeley. What must I unsay
To save him?" A quick eyelid dropt at Ben.
"Now tell me, Master Bame!"
"Sir, he derides
The books of Moses!"
"Bame, do you believe?—
There's none to hear us but Beëlzebub—
Do you believe that we must taste of death
Because God set a foolish naked wench
Too near an apple-tree, how long ago?
Five thousand years? But there were men on earth
Long before that!" "Nay, nay, sir, if you read
The books of Moses . . ." "Moses was a juggler!"
"A juggler, sir, how, what!" "Nay, sir, be calm!
Take some more wine—the white, if that's too red!
I never cared for Moses! Help yourself
To red-deer pie. Good!
All the miracles
You say that he performed—why, what are they?
I know one Heriots, lives in Friday Street,
Can do much more than Moses! Eat your pie
In patience, friend, the mouth of man performs
One good work at a time. What says he, Ben?
The red-deer stops his—what? Sticks in his gizzard?
O—*led them through the wilderness!* No doubt
He did—for forty years, and might have made
The journey in six months. Believe me, sir,

That is no miracle. Moses gulled the Jews!
Skilled in the sly tricks of the Egyptians,
Only one art betrayed him. Sir, his books
Are filthily written. I would undertake—
If I were put to write a new religion—
A method far more admirable. Eh, what?
Gruel in the vestibule? Interpret, Ben!
His mouth's too full! *O, the New Testament!*
Why, there, consider, were not all the Apostles
Fishermen and base fellows, without wit
Or worth?"—again his eyelid dropt at Ben—
"The Apostle Paul alone had wit, and he
Was a most timorous fellow in bidding us
Prostrate ourselves to worldly magistrates
Against our conscience! I shall fry for this?
I fear no bugbears or hobgoblins, sir,
And would have all men not to be afraid
Of roasting, toasting, pitch-forks, or the threats
Of earthly ministers, tho' their mouths be stuffed
With curses or with crusts of red-deer pie!
One thing I will confess—if I must choose—
Give me the Papists that can serve their God
Not with your scraps, but solemn ceremonies,
Organs, and singing men, and shaven crowns.
Your protestant is a hypocritical ass!"

"Profligate! You blaspheme!" Up started Bame,
A little unsteady now upon his feet,
And shaking his crumpled pamphlet over his head!

"Nay—if your pie be done, you shall partake
A second course. Be seated, sir, I pray.
We atheists will pay the reckoning!
I had forgotten that a Puritan
Will swallow Moses like a red-deer pie
Yet choke at a wax-candle! Let me read
Your pamphlet. What, 'tis half addressed to me!
Ogs-gogs! Ben! Hark to this—the Testament
Of poor Rob Greene would cut Will Shakespeare off
With less than his own Groatsworth! Hark to this!"
And there, unseen by them, a quiet figure

Entered the room and beckoning me for wine
Seated himself to listen, Will himself,
While Marlowe read aloud with knitted brows.
" '*Trust them not; for there is an upstart crow*
Beautified with our feathers!'
—O, he bids
All green eyes open:—'*And, being an absolute*
Johannes fac-totum is in his own conceit
The only Shake-scene in a country!' "
"Feathers!"
Exploded Ben. "Why, come to that, he pouched
Your eagle's feather of blank verse, and lit
His Friar Bacon's little magic lamp
At the Promethean fire of Faustus. Jove,
It was a faery buck, indeed, that Will
Poached in that greenwood."
"Ben, see that you walk
Like Adam, naked! Nay, in nakedness
Adam was first. Trust me, you'll not escape
This calumny! Vergil is damned—he wears
A hen-coop round his waist, nicked in the night
From Homer! Plato is branded for a thief,
Why, he wrote Greek! And old Prometheus, too,
Who stole his fire from heaven!"
"Who printed it?"
"Chettle! I know not why, unless he too
Be one of these same dwarfs that find the world
Too narrow for their jealousies. Ben, Ben,
I tell thee 'tis the dwarfs that find no world
Wide enough for their jostling, while the giants,
The gods themselves, can in one tavern find
Room wide enough to swallow the wide heaven
With all its crowded solitary stars."

"Why, then, the Mermaid Inn should swallow this,"
The voice of Shakespeare quietly broke in,
As laying a hand on either shoulder of Kit
He stood behind him in the gloom and smiled
Across the table at Ben, whose eyes still blazed
With boyhood's generous wrath. "Rob was a poet.
And had I known . . . no matter! I am sorry

He thought I wronged him. His heart's blood beats in this.
Look, where he says he dies forsaken, Kit!"
"Died drunk, more like," growled Ben. "And if he did,"
Will answered, "none was there to help him home,
Had not a poor old cobbler chanced upon him,
Dying in the streets, and taken him to his house,
And let him break his heart on his own bed.
Read his last words. You know he left his wife
And played the moth at tavern tapers, burnt
His wings and dropt into the mud. Read here,
His dying words to his forsaken wife,
Written in blood, Ben, blood. Read it, '*I charge thee,*
Doll, by the love of our youth, by my soul's rest,
See this man paid! Had he not succoured me
I had died in the streets.' How young he was to call
Thus on their poor dead youth, this withered shadow
That once was Robin Greene. He left a child—
See—in its face he prays her not to find
The father's, but her own. '*He is yet green*
And may grow straight,' so flickers his last jest,
Then out for ever. At the last he begged
A penny-pott of malmsey. In the bill,
All's printed now for crows and daws to peck,
You'll find four shillings for his winding sheet.
He had the poet's heart and God help all
Who have that heart and somehow lose their way
For lack of helm, souls that are blown abroad
By the great winds of passion, without power
To sway them, chartless captains. Multitudes ply
Trimly enough from bank to bank of Thames
Like shallow wherries, while tall galleons,
Out of their very beauty driven to dare
The uncompassed sea, founder in starless nights,
And all that we can say is—'They died drunk!'"

"I have it from veracious witnesses,"
Bame snuffled, "that the death of Robert Greene
Was caused by a surfeit, sir, of Rhenish wine
And pickled herrings. Also, sir, that his shirt
Was very foul, and while it was at wash
He lay i' the cobbler's old blue smock, sir!"

"Gods,"
The voice of Raleigh muttered nigh mine ear,
"I had a dirty cloak once on my arm;
But a Queen's feet had trodden it! Drawer, take
Yon pamphlet, have it fried in cod-fish oil
And bring it hither. Bring a candle, too,
And sealing-wax! Be quick. The rogue shall eat it,
And then I'll seal his lips."
"No—not to-night,"
Kit whispered, laughing, "I've a prettier plan
For Master Bame."
"As for that scrap of paper,"
The voice of Shakespeare quietly resumed,
"Why, which of us could send his heart and soul
Thro' Caxton's printing-press and hope to find
The pretty pair unmangled. I'll not trust
The spoken word, no, not of my own lips,
Before the Judgment Throne against myself
Or on my own defence; and I'll not trust
The printed word to mirror Robert Greene.
See—here's another Testament, in blood,
Written, not printed, for the Mermaid Inn.
Rob sent it from his death-bed straight to me.
Read it. 'Tis for the Mermaid Inn alone;
And when 'tis read, we'll burn it, as he asks."

Then, from the hands of Shakespeare, Marlowe took
A little scroll, and, while the winds without
Rattled the shutters with their ghostly hands
And wailed among the chimney-tops, he read:—

> Greeting to all the Mermaid Inn
> From their old Vice and Slip of Sin,
> Greeting, Ben, to you, and you
> Will Shakespeare and Kit Marlowe, too.
> Greeting from your Might-have-been,
> Your broken sapling, Robert Greene.
>
> Read my letter—'Tis my last,
> Then let Memory blot me out,
> I would not make my maudlin past
> A trough for every swinish snout.

First, I leave a debt unpaid,
It's all chalked up, not much all told,
For Bread and Sack. When I am cold,
Doll can pawn my Spanish blade
And pay mine host. She'll pay mine host!
But . . . I have chalked up other scores
In your own hearts, behind the doors,
Not to be paid so quickly. Yet,
O, if you would not have my ghost
Creeping in at dead of night,
Out of the cold wind, out of the wet,
With weeping face and helpless fingers
Trying to wipe the marks away,
Read what I can write, still write,
While this life within them lingers.
Let me pay, lads, let me pay.

Item, for a peacock phrase,
Flung out in a sudden blaze,
Flung out at his friend Shake-scene,
By this ragged Might-have-been,
This poor Jackdaw, Robert Greene.

Will, I knew it all the while!
And you know it—and you smile!
My quill was but a Jackdaw's feather,
While the quill that Ben, there, wields,
Fluttered down thro' azure fields,
From an eagle in the sun;
And yours, Will, yours, no earth-born thing,
A plume of rainbow-tinctured grain,
Dropt out of an angel's wing.
Only a Jackdaw's feather mine,
And mine ran ink, and Ben's ran wine,
And yours the pure Pierian streams.

But I had dreams, O, I had dreams!
Dreams, you understand me, Will;
And I fretted at the tether
That bound me to the lowly plain,
Gnawed my heart out, for I knew
Once, tho' that was long ago,

I might have risen with Ben and you
Somewhere near that Holy Hill
Whence the living rivers flow.
Let it pass. I did not know
One bitter phrase could ever fly
So far through that immortal sky
—Seeing all my songs had flown so low—
One envious phrase that cannot die
From century to century.

Kit Marlowe ceased a moment, and the wind,
As if indeed the night were all one ghost,
Wailed round the Mermaid Inn, then sent once more
Its desolate passion through the reader's voice:—

Some truth there was in what I said.
Kit Marlowe taught you half your trade;
And something of the rest you learned
From me,—but all you took you earned.
You took the best I had to give,
You took my clay and made it live;
And that—why that's what God must do!—
My music made for mortal ears
You flung to all the listening spheres.
You took my dreams and made them true.
And, if I claimed them, the blank air
Might claim the breath I shape to prayer.
I do not claim it! Let the earth
Claim the thrones she brings to birth.
Let the first shapers of our tongue
Claim whate'er is said or sung,
Till the doom repeal that debt
And cancel the first alphabet.
Yet when, like a god, you scaled
The shining crags where my foot failed;
When I saw my fruit of the vine
Foam in the Olympian cup,
Or in that broader chalice shine
Blood-red, a sacramental drink,
With stars for bubbles, lifted up,

Through the universal night,
Up to the celestial brink,
Up to that quintessential Light
Where God acclaimed you for the wine
Crushed from those poor grapes of mine;
O, you'll understand, no doubt,
How the poor vine-dresser fell,
How a pin-prick can let out
All the bannered hosts of hell,
Nay, a knife-thrust, the sharp truth—
I had spilt my wine of youth,
The Temple was not mine to build.
My place in the world's march was filled.

Yet—through all the years to come—
Men to whom my songs are dumb
Will remember them and me
For that one cry of jealousy,
That curse where I had come to bless,
That harsh voice of unhappiness.
They'll note the curse, but not the pang,
Not the torment whence it sprang,
They'll note the blow at my friend's back,
But not the soul stretched on the rack.
They'll note the weak convulsive sting,
Not the crushed body and broken wing.

Item, for my thirty years,
Dashed with sun and splashed with tears,
Wan with revel, red with wine,
This Jack-o-lanthorn life of mine.
Other wiser, happier men,
Take the full three-score-and-ten,
Climb slow, and seek the sun.
Dancing down is soon done.
Golden boys, beware, beware,—
The ambiguous oracles declare
Loving gods for those that die
Young, as old men may; but I,
Quick as was my pilgrimage,
Wither in mine April age.

Item, one groatsworth of wit,
Bought at an exceeding price,
Ay, a million of repentance.
Let me pay the whole of it.
Lying here these deadly nights,
Lads, for me the Mermaid lights
Gleam as for a castaway
Swept along a midnight sea
The harbour-lanthorns, each a spark,
A pin-prick in the solid dark,
That lets trickle through a ray
Glorious out of Paradise,
To stab him with new agony.
Let me pay, lads, let me pay!
Let the Mermaid pass the sentence:
I am pleading guilty now,
A dead leaf on the laurel-bough,
And the storm whirls me away.

Kit Marlowe ceased; but not the wailing wind
That round and round the silent Mermaid Inn
Wandered, with helpless fingers trying the doors,
Like a most desolate ghost.
A sudden throng
Of players bustled in, shaking the rain
From their plumed hats. "Veracious witnesses,"
The snuffle of Bame arose anew, "declare
It was a surfeit killed him, Rhenish wine
And pickled herrings. His shirt was very foul.
He had but one. His doublet, too, was frayed,
And his boots broken . . ."
"What! Gonzago, you!"
A short fat player called in a deep voice
Across the room and, throwing aside his cloak
To show the woman's robe he wore beneath,
Minced up to Bame and bellowed—" 'Tis such men
As you that tempt us women to our fall!"
And all the throng of players rocked and roared,
Till at a nod and wink from Kit a hush
Held them again.

"Look to the door," he said,
"Is any listening?" The young player crept,
A mask of mystery, to the door and peeped.
"All's well! The coast is clear!"
"Then shall we tell
Our plan to Master Bame?"
Round the hushed room
Went Kit, a pen and paper in his hand,
Whispering each to read, digest, and sign,
While Ben re-filled the glass of Master Bame.
"And now," said Kit aloud, "what think you, lads?
Shall he be told?" Solemnly one or two
'Gan shake their heads with "Safety! safety! Kit!"
"O, Bame can keep a secret! Come, we'll tell him!
He can advise us how a righteous man
Should act! We'll let him share an he approve.
Now, Master Bame,—come closer—my good friend,
Ben Jonson here, hath lately found a way
Of—hush! Come closer!—coining money, Bame."
"Coining!" "Ay, hush, now! Hearken! A certain sure
And indiscoverable method, sir!
He is acquainted with one Poole, a felon
Lately released from Newgate, hath great skill
In mixture of metals—hush!—and, by the help
Of a right cunning maker of stamps, we mean
To coin French crowns, rose-nobles, pistolettes,
Angels and English shillings."
For one breath
Bame stared at him with bulging beetle-eyes,
Then murmured shyly as a country maid
In her first wooing, "Is't not against the law?"
"Why, sir, who makes the law? Why should not Bame
Coin his own crowns like Queen Elizabeth?
She is but mortal! And consider, too,
The good works it should prosper in your hands,
Without regard to red-deer pies and wine
White as the Milky Way. Such secrets, Bame,
Were not good for the general; but a few
Discreet and righteous palms, your own, my friend,
And mine,—what think you?"

With a hesitant glance
Of well-nigh child-like cunning, screwing his eyes,
Bame laughed a little huskily and looked round
At that grave ring of anxious faces, all
Holding their breath and thrilling his blunt nerves
With their stage-practice. "And no risk?" breathed Bame,
"No risk at all?" "O, sir, no risk at all!
We make the very coins. Besides, that part
Touches not you. Yours is the honest face,
That's all we want."
"Why, sir, if you be sure
There is no risk . . ."
"You'll help to spend it. Good!
We'll talk anon of this, and you shall carry
More angels in your pocket, master Bame,
Than e'er you'll meet in heaven. Set hand on seal
To this now, master Bame, to prove your faith.
Come, all have signed it. Here's the quill, dip, write.
Good!"
And Kit, pocketing the paper, bowed
The gull to the inn-door, saying as he went,—
"You shall hear further when the plan's complete.
But there's one great condition—not one word,
One breath of scandal more on Robert Greene.
He's dead; but he was one of us. The day
You air his shirt, I air this paper, too."
No gleam of understanding, even then,
Illumed that long white face: no stage, indeed,
Has known such acting as the Mermaid Inn
That night, and Bame but sniggered, "Why, of course,
There's good in all men; and the best of us
Will make mistakes."
"But no mistakes in this,"
Said Kit, "or all together we shall swing
At Tyburn—who knows what may leap to light?—
You understand? No scandal!" "Not a breath!"
So, in dead silence, Master Richard Bame
Went out into the darkness and the night,
To ask, as I have heard, for many a moon,
The price of malmsey-butts and silken hose,
And doublets slashed with satin.

As the door
Slammed on his back, the pent-up laughter burst
With echo and re-echo round the room,
But ceased as Will tossed on the glowing hearth
The last poor Testament of Robert Greene.
All watched it burn. The black wind wailed and moaned
Around the Mermaid as the sparks flew up.
"God, what a night for ships upon the sea,"
Said Raleigh, peering through the wet black panes,
"Well—we may thank Him for the Little Red Ring!"
"*The Little Red Ring*," cried Kit, "*the Little Red Ring!*"
Then up stood Dekker on the old black settle.
"Give it a thumping chorus, lads," he called,
And sang this brave song of the Mermaid Inn:—

I

Seven wise men on an old black settle,
  Seven wise men of the Mermaid Inn,
Ringing blades of the one right metal,
  What is the best that a blade can win?
Bread and cheese, and a few small kisses?
  Ha! ha! ha! Would you take them—you?
—Ay, if Dame Venus would add to her blisses
  A roaring fire and a friend or two!

Chorus: Up now, answer me, tell me true!—
—Ay, if the hussy would add to her blisses
  A roaring fire and a friend or two!

II

What will you say when the world is dying?
  What, when the last wild midnight falls
Dark, too dark for the bat to be flying
  Round the ruins of old St. Paul's?
What will be last of the lights to perish?
  What but the little red ring we knew,
Lighting the hands and the hearts that cherish
  A fire, a fire, and a friend or two!

Chorus: Up now, answer me, tell me true!
What will be last of the stars to perish?
—The fire that lighteth a friend or two!

III

Up now, answer me, on your mettle
Wisest man of the Mermaid Inn,
Soberest man on the old black settle,
Out with the truth! It was never a sin.—
Well, if God saved me alone of the seven,
Telling me *you* must be damned, or *you*,
"This," I would say, "This is hell, not heaven!
Give me the fire and a friend or two!"

Chorus: Steel was never so ringing true:
"God," we would say, "this is hell, not heaven!
Give us the fire, and a friend or two!"

III

BLACK BILL'S HONEY-MOON

The garlands of a Whitsun ale were strewn
About our rushes, the night that Raleigh brought
Bacon to sup with us. There, on that night,
I saw the singer of the *Faërie Queen*
Quietly spreading out his latest cantos
For Shakespeare's eye, like white sheets in the sun.
Marlowe, our morning-star, and Michael Drayton
Talked in that ingle-nook. And Ben was there,
Humming a song upon that old black settle:
"Or leave a kiss but in the cup
And I'll not ask for wine."
But, meanwhile, he drank malmsey.

Francis Bacon

Straddled before the fire; and, all at once,
He said to Shakespeare, in a voice that gripped
The Mermaid Tavern like an arctic frost:

"There are no poets in this age of ours,
Not to compare with Plautus. They are all
Dead, the men that were famous in old days."
"Why—so they are," said Will. The humming stopped.
I saw poor Spenser, a shy gentle soul,
With haunted eyes like starlit forest pools,
Smuggling his cantos under his cloak again.
"There's verse enough, no doubt," Bacon went on,
"But English is no language for the Muse.
Whom would you call our best? There's Gabriel Harvey,
And Edward, Earl of Oxford. Then there's Dyer,
And Doctor Golding; while, for tragedy,
Thomas, Lord Buckhurst, hath a lofty vein.
And, in a lighter prettier vein, why, Will,
There is *thyself!* But—where's Euripides?"

"Dead," echoed Ben, in a deep ghost-like voice.
And drip—drip—drip—outside we heard the rain
Miserably dropping round the Mermaid Inn.

"Thy Summer's Night—eh, Will? Midsummer's Night?—
That's a quaint fancy," Bacon droned anew,
"But—Athens was an error, Will! Not Athens!
Titania knew not Athens! Those wild elves
Of thy Midsummer's Dream—eh? Midnight's Dream?—
Are English all. Thy woods, too, smack of England;
They never grew round Athens. Bottom, too,
He is not Greek!"
"Greek?" Will said, with a chuckle,
"Bottom a Greek? Why, no, he was the son
Of Marian Hacket, the fat wife that kept
An ale-house, Wincot-way. I lodged with her
Walking from Stratford. You have never tramped
Along that countryside? By Burton Heath?
Ah, well, you would not know my fairylands.
It warms my blood to let my home-spuns play
Around your cold white Athens. There's a joy
In jumping time and space."
But, as he took
The cup of sack I proffered, solemnly
The lawyer shook his head. "Will, couldst thou use

Thy talents with discretion, and obey
Classic examples, those mightst match old Plautus,
In all except priority of the tongue.
This English tongue is only for an age,
But Latin for all time. So I propose
To embalm in Latin my philosophies.
Well seize your hour! But, ere you die, you'll sail
A British galleon to the golden courts
Of Cleopatra."

"Sail it!" Marlowe roared,
Mimicking in a fit of thunderous glee
The drums and trumpets of his Tamburlaine:
"And let her buccaneers bestride the sphinx,
And play at bowls with Pharaoh's pyramids,
And hale white Egypt with their tarry hands
Home to the Mermaid! Lift the good old song
That Rob Greene loved. Gods, how the lad would shout it!
Stand up and sing, John Davis!"

"Up!" called Raleigh,
"Lift the chanty of Black Bill's Honey-moon, Jack!
We'll keep the chorus going!"

"Silence, all!"
Ben Jonson echoed, rolling on his bench:
"This gentle lawyer hath a longing, lads,
To hear a right Homeric hymn. Now, Jack!
But wet your whistle, first! A cup of sack
For the first canto! Muscadel, the next!
Canary for the last!" I brought the cup.
John Davis emptied it at one mighty draught,
Leapt on a table, stamped with either foot,
And straight began to troll this mad sea-tale:

CANTO THE FIRST

Let Martin Parker at hawthorn-tide
  Prattle in Devonshire lanes,
Let all his pedlar poets beside
  Rattle their gallows-chains,
A tale like mine they never shall tell
  Or a merrier ballad sing,
Till the Man in the Moon pipe up the tune
  And the stars play Kiss-in-the-Ring!

Chorus: Till Philip of Spain in England reign,
And the stars play Kiss-in-the-Ring!

All in the gorgeous dawn of day
From grey old Plymouth Sound
Our galleon crashed thro' the crimson spray
To sail the world around:
Cloud i' the Sun was her white-scrolled name,—
There was never a lovelier lass
For sailing in state after pieces of eight
With her bombards all of brass.

Chorus: Culverins, robinets, iron may-be;
But her bombards all of brass!

Now, they that go down to the sea in ships,
Though piracy be their trade,
For all that they pray not much with their lips
They know where the storms are made:
With the stars above and the sharks below,
They need not parson or clerk;
But our bo'sun Bill was an atheist still,
Except—sometimes—in the dark!

Chorus: Now let Kit Marlowe mark!
Our bo'sun Bill was an atheist still,
Except—sometimes—in the dark!

All we adventured for, who shall say,
Nor yet what our port might be?—
A magical city of old Cathay,
Or a castle of Muscovy,
With our atheist bo'sun, Bill, Black Bill,
Under the swinging Bear,
Whistling at night for a seaman to light
His little poop-lanthorns there.

Chorus: On the deep, in the night, for a seaman to light
His little lost lanthorns there.

But, as over the Ocean-sea we swept,
We chanced on a strange new land
Where a valley of tall white lilies slept
With a forest on either hand;
A valley of white in a purple wood
And, behind it, faint and far,
Breathless and bright o'er the last rich height
Floated the sunset-star.

Chorus: Fair and bright o'er the rose-red height,
Venus, the sunset-star.

'Twas a marvel to see, as we beached our boat,
Black Bill, in that peach-bloom air,
With the great white lilies that reached to his throat
Like a stained-glass bo'sun there,
And our little ship's chaplain, puffing and red,
A-starn as we onward stole,
With the disk of a lily behind his head
Like a cherubin's aureole.

Chorus: He was round and red and behind his head
He'd a cherubin's aureole.

"Hyrcania, land of honey and bees,
We have found thee at last," he said,
"Where the honey-comb swells in the hollow trees,"
(O, the lily behind his head!)
"The honey-comb swells in the purple wood!
'Tis the swette which the heavens distil,
Saith Pliny himself, on my little book-shelf!
Is the world not sweet to thee, Bill?"

Chorus: "Saith Pliny himself, on my little book-shelf!
Is the world not sweet to thee, Bill?"

Now a man may taste of the devil's hot spice,
And yet if his mind run back
To the honey of childhood's Paradise
His heart is not wholly black;

And Bill, Black Bill, from the days of his youth,
Tho' his chest was broad as an oak,
Had cherished one innocent little sweet tooth,
And it itched as our chaplain spoke.

Chorus: He had kept one perilous little tooth,
And it itched as our chaplain spoke.

All around was a mutter of bees,
And Bill 'gan muttering too,—
"If the honey-comb swells in the hollow trees,
(What else can a Didymus do?)
I'll steer to the purple woods myself
And see if this thing be so,
Which the chaplain found on his little book-shelf,
For Pliny lived long ago."

Chorus: There's a platter of delf on his little book-shelf,
And Pliny lived long ago.

Scarce had he spoken when, out of the wood,
And buffeting all around,
Rooting our sea-boots where we stood,
There rumbled a marvellous sound,
As a mountain of honey were crumbling asunder,
Or a sunset-avalanche hurled
Honey-comb boulders of golden thunder
To smother the old black world.

Chorus: Honey-comb boulders of musical thunder
To mellow this old black world.

And the chaplain he whispered—"This honey, one saith,
On my camphired cabin-shelf,
None may harvest on pain of death;
For the bee would eat it himself!
None walketh those woods but him whose voice
In the dingles you then did hear!"
"A Voice?" growls Bill. "Ay, Bill, r-r-rejoice!
'Twas the great Hyrcanian Bear!"

Chorus: Give thanks! *Re*-joice! 'Twas the glor-r-r-ious
Voice
Of the great Hyrcanian Bear!

But, marking that Bill looked bitter indeed,
For his sweet tooth hungered sore,
"Consider," he saith, "that the Sweet hath need
Of the Sour, as the Sea of the Shore!
As the night to the day is our grief to our joy,
And each for its brother prepares
A banquet, Bill, that would otherwise cloy.
Thus is it with honey and bears."

Chorus: Roses and honey and laughter would cloy!
Give us thorns, too, and sorrow and bears!

"Consider," he saith, "how by fretting a string
The lutanist maketh sweet moan,
And a bird ere it fly must have air for its wing
To buffet or fall like a stone:
Tho' you blacken like Pluto you make but more white
These blooms which not Enna could yield!
Consider, Black Bill, ere the coming of night,
The lilies," he saith, "of the field."

Chorus: "Consider, Black Bill, in this beautiful light,
The lilies," he saith, "of the field."

"Consider the claws of a Bear," said Bill,
"That can rip off the flesh from your bones,
While his belly could cabin the skipper and still
Accommodate Timothy Jones!
Why, that's where a seaman who cares for his grog
Perspires how this world isn't square!
If there's *cause* for a *cow*, if there's *use* for a *dog*,
By Pope John, there's no *Sense* in a *Bear!*"

Chorus: Cause for a cow, use for a dog,
By'r Lakin, no *Sense* in a *Bear!*

But our little ship's chaplain—"Sense," quoth he,
"Hath the Bear tho' his making have none:
For, my little book saith, by the sting of this bee
Would Ursus be wholly foredone,
But, or ever the hive he adventureth nigh
And its crisp gold-crusted dome,
He lardeth his nose and he greaseth his eye
With a piece of an honey-comb."

Chorus: His velvety nose and his sensitive eye
With a piece of an honey-comb.

Black Bill at the word of that golden crust
—For his ears had forgotten the roar,
And his eyes grew soft with their innocent lust—
'Gan licking his lips once more:
"Be it bound like a missal and printed as fair,
With capitals blue and red,
'Tis a lie; for what honey could comfort a bear,
Till the bear win the honey?" he said.

Chorus: "Ay, *whence* the first honey wherewith the first bear
First larded his nose?" he said.

"Thou first metaphysical bo'sun, Bill,"
Our chaplain quizzingly cried,
"Wilt thou riddle me redes of a dumpling still
With thy 'how came the apple inside'?"
"Nay," answered Bill, "but I quest for truth,
And I find it not on your shelf!
I will face your Hyrcanian bear, forsooth,
And look at his nose myself."

Chorus: For truth, for truth, or a little sweet tooth—
I will into the woods myself.

Breast-high thro' that foam-white ocean of bloom
With its wonderful spokes of gold,
Our sun-burnt crew in the rose-red gloom
Like buccaneer galleons rolled:

Breast-high, breast-high in the lilies we stood,
And before we could say "good-night,"
Out of the valley and into the wood
He plunged thro' the last rich light.

Chorus: Out of the lilies and into the wood,
Where the Great Bear walks all night!

And our little ship's chaplain he piped thro' the trees
As the moon rose, white and still,
"Hylas, return to thy Heracles!"
And we helped him with "Come back, Bill!"
Thrice he piped it, thrice we halloo'd,
And thrice we were dumb to hark;
But never an answer came from the wood,
So—we turned to our ship in the dark.

Chorus: Good-bye, Bill! you're a Didymus still;
But—you're all alone in the dark.

"This honey now"—as the first canto ceased,
The great young Bacon pompously began—
"Which Pliny calleth, as it were, the swette
Of heaven, or spettle of the stars, is found
In Muscovy. Now . . ." "Bring the muscadel,"
Ben Jonson roared—"'Tis a more purple drink,
And suits with the next canto!"
At one draught
John Davis drained the cup, and with one hand
Beating the measure, rapidly trolled again.

CANTO THE SECOND

Now, Rabelais, art thou quite foredone,
Dan Chaucer, Drayton, Every One!
Leave we aboard our *Cloud i' the Sun*
This crew of pirates dreaming—
Of Angels, minted in the blue
Like golden moons, Rose-nobles, too,
As under the silver-sliding dew
Our emerald creek lay gleaming!

Chorus: Under the stars lay gleaming!

And mailed with scales of gold and green
The high star-lilied banks between,
Nosing our old black hulk unseen,
  Great alligators shimmered:
Blood-red jaws i' the blue-black ooze,
Where all the long warm day they snooze,
Chewing old cuds of pirate-crews,
  Around us grimly glimmered.

Chorus: Their eyes like rubies glimmered.

Let us now sing of Bill, good sirs!
Follow him, all green forestéres,
Fearless of Hyrcanian bears
  As of these ghostly lilies!
For O, not Drayton there could sing
Of wild Pigwiggen and his King
So merry a jest, so jolly a thing
  As this my tale of Bill is.

Chorus: Into the woods where Bill is!

Now starts he as a white owl hoots,
And now he stumbles over roots,
And now beneath his big sea-boots
  In yon deep glade he crunches
Black cakes of honey-comb that were
So elfin-sweet, perchance, last year;
But neither Bo'sun, now, nor Bear
  At that dark banquet munches.

Chorus: Onward still he crunches!

Black cakes of honey-comb he sees
Above him in the forks of trees,
Filled by stars instead of bees,
  With brimming silver glisten:
But ah, such food of gnome and fay
Could neither Bear nor Bill delay
Till where yon ferns and moonbeams play
  He starts and stands to listen!

Chorus: What melody doth he listen?

Is it the Night-Wind as it comes
Through the wood and softly thrums
Silvery tabors, purple drums,
  To speed some wild-wood revel?
Nay, Didymus, what faint sweet din
Of viol and flute and violin
Makes all the forest round thee spin,
  The Night-Wind or the Devil?

Chorus: No doubt at all—the Devil!

He stares, with naked knife in hand,
This buccaneer in fairyland!
Dancing in a saraband
  The red ferns reel about him!
Dancing in a morrice-ring
The green ferns curtsey, kiss and cling!
Their Marians flirt, their Robins fling
  Their feathery heels to flout him!

Chorus: The whole wood reels about him.

Dance, ye shadows! O'er the glade,
Bill, the Bo'sun, undismayed,
Pigeon-toes with glittering blade!
  Drake was never bolder!
Devil or Spaniard, what cares he
Whence your eerie music be?
Till—lo, against yon old oak-tree
  He leans his brawny shoulder!

Chorus: He lists and leans his shoulder!

Ah, what melody doth he hear
As to that gnarled old tree-trunk there
He lays his wind-bit brass-ringed ear,
  And steals his arm about it?
What Dryad could this Bo'sun win
To that slow-rippling amorous grin?—
'Twas full of singing bees within!
  Not Didymus could doubt it!

Chorus: So loud they buzzed about it!

Straight, o'er a bough one leg he throws,
And up that oaken main-mast goes
With reckless red unlarded nose
  And gooseberry eyes of wonder!
Till now, as in a galleon's hold,
Below, he sees great cells of gold
Whence all the hollow trunk up-rolled
  A low melodious thunder.

Chorus: A sweet and perilous thunder!

Ay, there, within that hollow tree,
Will Shakespeare, mightst thou truly see
The Imperial City of the Bee,
  In Chrysomelan splendour!
And, in the midst, one eight-foot dome
Swells o'er that Titan honey-comb
Where the Bee-Empress hath her home,
  With such as do attend her.

Chorus: Weaponed with stings attend her!

But now her singing sentinels
Have turned to sleep in waxen cells,
And Bill leans down his face and smells
  The whole sweet summer's cargo—
In one deep breath, the whole year's bloom,
Lily and thyme and rose and broom,
One Golden Fleece of flower-perfume
  In that old oaken Argo.

Chorus: That green and golden Argo!

And now he hangs with dangling feet
Over that dark abyss of sweet,
Striving to reach such wild gold meat
  As none could buy for money:
His left hand grips a swinging branch
When—crack! Our Bo'sun, stout and stanch,
Falls like an Alpine avalanche,
  Feet first into the honey!

Chorus: Up to his ears in honey!

And now his red unlarded nose
And bulging eyes are all that shows
Above it, as he puffs and blows!
  And now—to 'scape the scathing
Of that black host of furious bees
His nose and eyes he fain would grease
And bobs below those golden seas
  Like an old woman bathing.

Chorus: Old Mother Hubbard bathing!

And now he struggles, all in vain,
To reach some little bough again;
But, though he heaves with might and main,
  This honey holds his ribs, sirs,
So tight, a barque might sooner try
To steer a cargo through the sky
Than Bill, thus honey-logged, to fly
  By flopping of his jib, sirs!

Chorus: His tops'l and his jib, sirs!

Like Oberon in the hive his beard
With wax and honey all besmeared
Would make the crescent moon afeard
  That now is sailing brightly
Right o'er his leafy donjon-keep!
But that she knows him sunken deep,
And that his tower is straight and steep,
  She would not smile so lightly.

Chorus: Look down and smile so lightly.

She smiles in that small heavenly space,
Ringed with the tree-trunk's leafy grace,
While upward grins his ghastly face
  As if some wild-wood Satyr,
Some gnomish Ptolemy should dare
Up that dark optic tube to stare,
As all unveiled she floated there,
  Poor maiden moon, straight at her!

Chorus: The buccaneering Satyr!

But there, till some one help him out,
Black Bill must stay, without a doubt.
"*Help! Help!*" he gives a muffled shout!
None but the white owls hear it!
Who? Whoo? they cry: Bill answers "ME!
I am stuck fast in this great tree!
Bring me a rope, good Timothy!
There's honey, lads, we'll share it!"

Chorus: Ay, now he wants to share it.

Then, thinking help may come with morn,
He sinks, half-famished and out-worn,
And scarce his nose exalts its horn
Above that sea of glory!
But, even as he owns defeat,
His belly saith, "A man must eat,
And since there is none other meat,
Come, lap this mess before 'ee!"

Chorus: This glorious mess before 'ee.

Then Dian sees a right strange sight
As, bidding him a fond good-night,
She flings a silvery kiss to light
In that deep oak-tree hollow,
And finds that gold and crimson nose
A moving, munching, ravenous rose
That up and down unceasing goes,
Save when he stops to swallow!

Chorus: He finds it hard to swallow!

Ay, now his best becomes his worst,
For honey cannot quench his thirst,
Though he should eat until he burst;
But, ah, the skies are kindly,
And from their tender depths of blue
They send their silver-sliding dew.
So Bill thrusts out his tongue anew
And waits to catch it—blindly!

Chorus: For ah, the stars are kindly!

And sometimes, with a shower of rain,
They strive to ease their prisoner's pain:
Then Bill thrusts out his tongue again
  With never a grace, the sinner!
And day and night and day goes by,
And never a comrade comes anigh,
And still the honey swells as high
  For supper, breakfast, dinner!

Chorus: Yet Bill has grown no thinner!

The young moon grows to full and throws
Her buxom kiss upon his nose,
As nightly over the tree she goes,
  And peeps and smiles and passes,
Then with her fickle silver flecks
Our old black galleon's dreaming decks;
And then her face, with nods and becks,
  In midmost ocean glasses.

Chorus: 'Twas ever the way with lasses!

Ah, Didymus, hast thou won indeed
That Paradise which is thy meed?
(Thy tale not all that run may read!)
  Thy sweet hath now no leaven!
Now, like an onion in a cup
Of mead, thou liest for Jove to sup,
Could Polyphemus lift thee up
  With Titan hands to heaven!

Chorus: This great oak-cup to heaven!

The second canto ceased; and, as they raised
Their wine-cups with the last triumphant note,
Bacon, undaunted, raised his grating voice—
"This honey which, in some sort, may be styled
The Spettle of the Stars . . ." "Bring the Canary!"
Ben Jonson roared. "It is a moral wine
And suits the third, last canto!" At one draught
John Davis drained it and began anew.

CANTO THE THIRD

A month went by. We were hoisting sail!
We had lost all hope of Bill;
Though, laugh as you may at a seaman's tale,
He was fast in his honey-comb still!
And often he thinks of the chaplain's word
In the days he shall see no more,—
How the Sweet, indeed, of the Sour hath need;
And the Sea, likewise, of the Shore.

Chorus: The chaplain's word of the Air and a Bird;
Of the Sea, likewise, and the Shore!

"O, had I the wings of a dove, I would fly
To a heaven, of aloes and gall!
I have honeyed," he yammers, "my nose and mine eye,
And the bees cannot sting me at all!
And it's O, for the sting of a little brown bee,
Or to blister my hands on a rope,
Or to buffet a thundering broad-side sea
On a deck like a mountain-slope!"

Chorus: With her mast snapt short, and a list to port
And a deck like a mountain-slope.

But alas, and he thinks of the chaplain's voice
When that roar from the woods out-break—
R-r-re-joice! *R-r-re-joice*! "Now, wherefore rejoice
In the music a bear could make?
'Tis a judgment, maybe, that I stick in this tree;
Yet in this I out-argued him fair!
Though I live, though I die, in this honey-comb pie,
By Pope Joan, there's no sense in a bear!"

Chorus: Notes in a nightingale, plums in a pie,
By'r Lakin, no *Sense* in a *Bear!*

He knew not our anchor was heaved from the mud:
He was growling it over again,
When—a strange sound suddenly froze his blood,
And curdled his big slow brain!—

A marvellous sound, as of great steel claws
Gripping the bark of his tree,
Softly ascended! Like lightning ended
His honey-comb reverie!

Chorus: The honey-comb quivered! The little leaves shivered!
Something was climbing the tree!

Something that breathed like a fat sea-cook,
Or a pirate of fourteen ton!
But it clomb like a cat (tho' the whole tree shook)
Stealthily tow'rds the sun,
Till, as Black Bill gapes at the little blue ring
Overhead, which he calls the sky,
It is clean blotted out by a monstrous Thing
Which—*hath larded its nose and its eye.*

Chorus: O, well for thee, Bill, that this monstrous Thing
Hath blinkered its little red eye.

Still as a mouse lies Bill with his face
Low down in the dark sweet gold,
While this monster turns round in the leaf-fringed space!
Then—taking a good firm hold,
As the skipper descending the cabin-stair,
Tail-first with a vast slow tread,
Solemnly, softly, cometh this Bear
Straight down o'er the Bo'sun's head.

Chorus: Solemnly—slowly—cometh this Bear,
Tail-first o'er the Bo'sun's head.

Nearer—nearer—then all Bill's breath
Out-bursts in one leap and yell!
And this Bear thinks, "Now am I gripped from beneath
By a roaring devil from hell!"
And madly Bill clutches his brown bow-legs,
And madly this Bear doth hale,
With his little red eyes fear-mad for the skies
And Bill's teeth fast in his tail!

Chorus: Small wonder a Bear should quail!
To have larded his nose, to have greased his eyes,
And be stung at the last in his tail.

Pull, Bo'sun! Pull, Bear! In the hot sweet gloom,
Pull Bruin, pull Bill, for the skies!
Pull—out of their gold with a bombard's boom
Come Black Bill's honeyed thighs!
Pull! Up! Up! Up! with a scuffle and scramble,
To that little blue ring of bliss,
This Bear doth go with our Bo'sun in tow
Stinging his tail, I wis.

Chorus: And this Bear thinks—"Many great bees I know,
But there never was Bee like this!"

. . . . . .

All in the gorgeous death of day
We had slipped from our emerald creek,
And our *Cloud i' the Sun* was careening away
With the old gay flag at the peak,
When, suddenly, out of the purple wood,
Breast-high thro' the lilies there danced
A tall lean figure, black as a nigger,
That shouted and waved and pranced!

Chorus: A gold-greased figure, but black as a nigger,
Waving his shirt as he pranced!

"'Tis Hylas! 'Tis Hylas!" our chaplain flutes,
And our skipper he looses a shout!
"'Tis Bill! Black Bill, in his old sea-boots!
Stand by to bring her about!
Har-r-rd a-starboard!" And round we came,
With a lurch and a dip and a roll,
And a banging boom thro' the rose-red gloom
For our old Black Bo'sun's soul!

Chorus: Alive! Not dead! Tho' behind his head
He'd a seraphin's aureole!

. . . . . .

And our chaplain he sniffs, as Bill finished his tale,
(With the honey still scenting his hair!)
O'er a plate of salt beef and a mug of old ale—
"By Pope Joan, there's no sense in a bear!"
And we laughed, but our Bo'sun he solemnly growls
—"Till the sails of yon heavens be furled,
It taketh—now, mark!—all the beasts in the Ark,
Teeth and claws, too, to make a good world!"

Chorus: Till the great—blue—sails—be—furled,
It taketh—now, mark!—all the beasts in the Ark,
Teeth and claws, too, to make a good world!

"Sack! Sack! Canary! Malmsey! Muscadel!"—
As the last canto ceased, the Mermaid Inn
Chorussed. I flew from laughing voice to voice;
But, over all the hubbub, rose the drone
Of Francis Bacon,—"Now, this Muscovy
Is a cold clime, not favourable to bees
(Or love, which is a weakness of the south)
As well might be supposed. Yet, as hot lands
Gender hot fruits and odoriferous spice,
In this case we may think that honey and flowers
Are comparable with the light airs of May
And a more temperate region. Also we see,
As Pliny saith, this honey being a swette
Of heaven, a certain spettle of the stars,
Which, gathering unclean vapours as it falls,
Hangs as a fat dew on the boughs, the bees
Obtain it partly thus, and afterwards
Corrupt it in their stomachs, and at last
Expel it through their mouths and harvest it
In hives; yet, of its heavenly source it keeps
A great part. Thus, by various principles
Of natural philosophy we observe—"
And, as he leaned to Drayton, droning thus,
I saw a light gleam of celestial mirth
Flit o'er the face of Shakespeare—scarce a smile—
A swift irradiation from within
As of a cloud that softly veils the sun.

IV

THE SIGN OF THE GOLDEN SHOE

We had just set our brazier smouldering,
To keep the Plague away. Many a house
Was marked with the red cross. The bells tolled
Incessantly. Nash crept into the room
Shivering like a fragment of the night,
His face yellow as parchment, and his eyes
Burning.
"The Plague! He has taken it!" voices cried.
"That's not the Plague! The old carrion-crow is drunk;
But stand away. What ails you, Nash my lad?"
Then, through the clamour, as through a storm at sea,
The master's voice, the voice of Ben, rang out,
"Nash!"
Ben leapt to his feet, and like a ship
Shouldering the waves, he shouldered the throng aside.
"What ails you, man? What's that upon your breast?
Blood?"
"Marlowe is dead," said Nash,
And stunned the room to silence . . .
"Marlowe—dead!"
Ben caught him by the shoulders. "Nash! Awake!
What do you mean? Marlowe? Kit Marlowe? Dead?
I supped with him—why—not three nights ago!
You are drunk! You are dazed! There's blood upon your
coat!"
"That's—where he died," said Nash, and suddenly sank
Sidelong across a bench, bowing his head
Between his hands . . .
Wept, I believe. Then, like a whip of steel,
His lean black figure sprang erect again.
"Marlowe!" he cried, "Kit Marlowe, killed for a punk,
A taffeta petticoat! Killed by an apple-squire!
Drunk! I was drunk; but I am sober now,
Sober enough, by God! Poor Kit is dead."

. . . . . .

The Mermaid Inn was thronged for many a night
With startled faces. Voices rose and fell,
As I recall them, in a great vague dream,
Curious, pitiful, angry, thrashing out
The tragic truth. Then, all along the Cheape,
The ballad-mongers waved their sheets of rhyme,
Croaking: *Come buy! Come buy! The bloody death*
Of Wormall, writ by Master Richard Bame!
Come buy! Come buy! The Atheist's Tragedy.
And, even in Bread Street, at our very door,
The crowder to his cracked old fiddle sang:—

> *"He was a poet of proud repute*
> *And wrote full many a play,*
> *Now strutting in a silken suit,*
> *Now begging by the way."*

Then, out of the hubbub and the clash of tongues,
The bawdy tales and scraps of balladry,
(As out of chaos rose the slow round world)
At last, though for the Mermaid Inn alone,
Emerged some tragic semblance of a soul,
Some semblance of the rounded truth, a world
Glimpsed only through great mists of blood and tears,
Yet smitten, here and there, with dreadful light,
As I believe, from heaven.
Strangely enough,
(Though Ben forgot his pipe and Will's deep eyes
Deepened and softened, when they spoke of Kit,
For many a month thereafter) it was Nash
That took the blow like steel into his heart.
Nash, our "Piers Penniless," whom Rob Greene had called
"Young Juvenal," the first satirist of our age
Nash, of the biting tongue and subtle sneer,
Brooded upon it, till his grief became
Sharp as a rapier, ready to lunge in hate
At all the lies of shallower hearts.
One night,
The night he raised the mists from that wild world,
He talked with Chapman in the Mermaid Inn
Of Marlowe's poem that was left half-sung,
His *Hero and Leander*.

"Kit desired,
If he died first, that you should finish it,"
Said Nash.
A loaded silence filled the room
As with the imminent spirit of the dead
Listening. And long that picture haunted me:
Nash, like a lithe young Mephistopheles
Leaning between the silver candle-sticks,
Across the oak table, with his keen white face,
Dark smouldering eyes, and black, dishevelled hair;
Chapman, with something of the steady strength
That helms our ships, and something of the Greek,
The cool clear passion of Platonic thought
Behind the fringe of his Olympian beard
And broad Homeric brows, confronting him
Gravely.
There was a burden of mystery
Brooding on all that night; and, when at last
Chapman replied, I knew he felt it, too.
The curious pedantry of his wonted speech
Was charged with living undertones, like truths
Too strange and too tremendous to be breathed
Save thro' a mask. And though, in lines that flamed
Once with strange rivalry, Shakespeare himself defied
Chapman, that spirit "by spirits taught to write
Above a mortal pitch," Will's nimbler sense
Was quick to breathings from beyond our world
And could not hold them lightly.
"Ah, then Kit,"
Said Chapman, "had some prescience of his end,
Like many another dreamer. What strange hints
Of things past, present, and to come, there lie
Sealed in the magic pages of that music
Which, laying strong hold on universal laws,
Ranges beyond these mud-walls of the flesh,
Though dull wits fail to follow. It was this
That made men find an oracle in the books
Of Vergil, and an everlasting fount
Of science in the prophets."
Once again
That haunted silence filled the shadowy room;

And, far away up Bread Street, we could hear
The crowder, piping of black Wormall still:—

"He had a friend, once gay and green,
Who died of want alone,
In whose black fate he might have seen
The warning of his own."

"Strange he should ask a hod-man like myself
To crown that miracle of his April age,"
Said Chapman, murmuring softly under breath,
"*Amorous Leander, beautiful and young* . . .
Why, Nash, had I been only charged to raise
Out of its grave in the green Hellespont
The body of that boy,
To make him sparkle and leap thro' the cold waves
And fold young Hero to his heart again,
The task were scarce as hard.
But . . . stranger still,"—
And his next words, although I hardly knew
All that he meant, went tingling through my flesh—
"Before you spoke, before I knew his wish,
I had begun to write!
I knew and loved
His work. Himself I hardly knew at all;
And yet—I know him now! I have heard him now
And, since he pledged me in so rare a cup,
I'll lift and drink to him, though lightnings fall
From envious gods to scourge me. I will lift
This cup in darkness to the soul that reigns
In light on Helicon. Who knows how near?
For I have thought, sometimes, when I have tried
To work his will, the hand that moved my pen
Was mine, and yet—not mine. The bodily mask
Is mine, and sometimes, dull as clay, it sleeps
With old Musæus. Then strange flashes come,
Oracular glories, visionary gleams,
And the mask moves, not of itself, and sings."
"I know that thought," said Nash. "A mighty ship,
A lightning-shattered wreck, out in that night,
Unseen, has foundered thundering. We sit here

Snug on the shore, and feel the wash of it,
The widening circles running to our feet.
Can such a soul go down to glut the sharks
Without one ripple? Here comes one sprinkle of spray.
Listen!" And through that night, quick and intense,
And hushed for thunder, tingled once again,
Like a thin wire, the crowder's distant tune:—

"Had he been prenticed to the trade
His father followed still,
This exit he had never made,
Nor played a part so ill."

"Here is another," said Nash, "I know not why;
But like a weed in the long wash, I too
Was moved, not of myself, to a tune like this.
O, I can play the crowder, fiddle a song
On a dead friend, with any the best of you.
Lie and kick heels in the sun on a dead man's grave—
And yet—God knows—it is the best we can;
And better than the world's way, to forget."
So saying, like one that murmurs happy words
To torture his own grief, half in self-scorn,
He breathed a scrap of balladry that raised
The mists a moment from that Paradise,
That primal world of innocence, where Kit
In childhood played, outside his father's shop,
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*, as thus:—

A cobbler lived in Canterbury
—He is dead now, poor soul!—
He sat at his door and stitched in the sun,
Nodding and smiling at everyone;
For St. Hugh makes all good cobblers merry,
And often he sang as the pilgrims passed,
"I can hammer a soldier's boot,
And daintily glove a dainty foot.
Many a sandal from my hand
Has walked the road to Holy Land.
Knights may fight for me, priests may pray for me,
Pilgrims walk the pilgrim's way for me,

I have a work in the world to do!
—*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*
To good St. Hugh!—
The cobbler must stick to his last."

And anon he would cry
"Kit! Kit! Kit!" to his little son,
"Look at the pilgrims riding by!
Dance down, hop down, after them, run!"
Then, like an unfledged linnet, out
Would tumble the brave little lad,
With a piping shout,—
"O, look at them, look at them, look at them, Dad!
Priest and prioress, abbot and friar,
Soldier and seaman, knight and squire!
How many countries have they seen?
Is there a king there, is there a queen?
Dad, one day,
Thou and I must ride like this,
All along the Pilgrim's Way,
By Glastonbury and Samarcand,
El Dorado and Cathay,
London and Persepolis,
All the way to Holy Land!"

Then, shaking his head as if he knew,
Under the sign of the *Golden Shoe*,
Touched by the glow of the setting sun,
While the pilgrims passed,
The little cobbler would laugh and say:
"When you are old you will understand
'Tis a very long way
To Samarcand!
Why, largely to exaggerate
Befits not men of small estate,
But—I should say, yes, I should say,
'Tis a hundred miles from where you stand;
And a hundred more, my little son,
A hundred more, to Holy Land! . . .

I have a work in the world to do
—*Trowl the bowl, the nut-brown bowl,*
To good St. Hugh!—
The cobbler must stick to his last."

"Which last," said Nash, breaking his rhyme off short,
"The crowder, after his kind, would seem to approve.
Well—all the waves from that great wreck out there
Break, and are lost in one withdrawing sigh:

The little lad that used to play
Around the cobbler's door,
Kit Marlowe, Kit Marlowe,
We shall not see him more.

But—could I tell you how that galleon sank,
Could I but bring you to that hollow whirl,
The black gulf in mid-ocean, where that wreck
Went thundering down, and round it hell still roars,
That were a tale to snap all fiddle-strings."
"Tell me," said Chapman.
"Ah, you wondered why,"
Said Nash, "you wondered why he asked your help
To crown that work of his. Why, Chapman, think,
Think of the cobbler's awl—there's a stout lance
To couch at London, there's a conquering point
To carry in triumph through Persepolis!
I tell you Kit was nothing but a child,
When some rich patron of the *Golden Shoe*
Beheld him riding into Samarcand
Upon a broken chair, the which he said
Was a white steed, splashed with the blood of kings.
When, on that patron's bounty, he did ride
So far as Cambridge, he was a brave lad,
Untamed, adventurous, but still innocent,
O, innocent as the cobbler's little self!
He brought to London just a bundle and stick,
A slender purse, an Ovid, a few scraps
Of song, and all unshielded, all unarmed
A child's heart, packed with splendid hopes and dreams.
I say a child's heart, Chapman, and that phrase
Crowns, not dis-crowns, his manhood.

Well—he turned
An honest penny, taking some small part
In plays at the *Red Bull*. And, all the while,
Beyond the paint and tinsel of the stage,
Beyond the greasy cock-pit with its reek
Of orange-peel and civet, as all of these
Were but the clay churned by the glorious rush
Of his white chariots and his burning steeds,
Nay, as the clay were a shadow, his great dreams,
Like bannered legions on some proud crusade,
Empurpling all the deserts of the world,
Swept on in triumph to the glittering towers
Of his abiding City.

Then—he met
That damned blood-sucking cockatrice, the pug
Of some fine strutting mummer, one of those plagues
Bred by our stage, a puff-ball on the hill
Of Helicon. As for his wench—she too
Had played so many parts that she forgot
The cue for truth. King Puff had taught her well.
He was the vainer and more foolish thing,
She the more poisonous.

One dark day, to spite
Archer, her latest paramour, a friend
And apple-squire to Puff, she set her eyes
On Marlowe . . . feigned a joy in his young art,
Murmured his songs, used all her London tricks
To coney-catch the country greenhorn. Man,
Kit never even *saw* her painted face!
He pored on books by candle-light and saw
Everything thro' a mist. O, I could laugh
To think of it, only—his up-turned skull
There, in the dark, now that the flesh drops off,
Has laughed enough, a horrible silent laugh,
To think his Angel of Light was, after all,
Only the red-lipped Angel of the Plague.
He was no better than the rest of us,
No worse. He felt the heat. He felt the cold.
He took her down to Deptford to escape
Contagion, and the crashing of sextons' spades
On dead men's bones in every churchyard round;

The jangling bell and the cry, *Bring out your dead.*
And there she told him of her luckless life,
Wedded, deserted, both against her will,
A luckless Eve that never knew the snake.
True and half-true she mixed in one wild lie,
And then—she caught him by the hand and wept.
No death-cart passed to warn him with its bell.
Her eyes, her perfumed hair, and her red mouth.
Her warm white breast, her civet-scented skin,
Swimming before him, in a piteous mist,
Made the lad drunk, and—she was in his arms;
And all that God had meant to wake one day
Under the Sun of Love, suddenly woke
By candle-light and cried, 'The Sun; The Sun!'
And be believed it, Chapman, he believed it!
He was a cobbler's son, and he believed
In Love! Blind, through that mist, he caught at Love,
The everlasting King of all this world.

Kit was not clever. Clever men—like Pomp—
Might jest. And fools might laugh. But when a man,
Simple as all great elemental things,
Makes his whole heart a sacrificial fire
To one whose love is in her supple skin,
There comes a laughter in which jests break up
Like icebergs in a sea of burning marl.
Then dreamers turn to murderers in an hour.
Then topless towers are burnt, and the Ocean-sea
Tramples the proud fleet, down, into the dark,
And sweeps over it, laughing. Come and see,
The heart now of this darkness—no more waves,
But the black central hollow where that wreck
Went down for ever.

How should Piers Penniless
Brand that wild picture on the world's black heart?—
Last night I tried the way of the Florentine,
And bruised myself; but we are friends together
Mourning a dead friend, none will ever know!—
Kit, do you smile at poor Piers Penniless,
Measuring it out? Ah, boy, it is my best!
Since hearts must beat, let it be *terza rima*,

A ladder of rhyme that two sad friends alone
May let down, thus, to the last circle of hell."

So saying, and motionless as a man in trance,
Nash breathed the words that raised the veil anew,
Strange intervolving words which, as he spake them,
Moved like the huge slow whirlpool of that pit
Where the wreck sank, the serpentine slow folds
Of the lewd Kraken that sucked it, shuddering, down:—

This is the Deptford Inn. Climb the dark stair.
Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead!
See, on the table, by that broken chair,

The little phials of paint—the white and red.
A cut-lawn kerchief hangs behind the door,
Left by his punk, even as the tapster said.

There is the gold-fringed taffeta gown she wore,
And, on that wine-stained bed, as is most meet,
He lies alone, never to waken more.

O, still as chiselled marble, the frayed sheet
Folds the still form on that sepulchral bed,
Hides the dead face, and peaks the rigid feet.

Come, come and see Kit Marlowe lying dead!
Draw back the sheet, ah, tenderly lay bare
The splendour of that Apollonian head;

The gloriole of his flame-coloured hair;
The lean athletic body, deftly planned
To carry that swift soul of fire and air;

The long thin flanks, the broad breast, and the grand
Heroic shoulders! Look, what lost dreams lie
Cold in the fingers of that delicate hand;

And, shut within those lyric lips, what cry
Of unborn beauty, sunk in utter night,
Lost worlds of song, sealed in an unknown sky,

Never to be brought forth, clothed on with light.
  Was this, then, this the secret of his song?—
Who ever loved that loved not at first sight!

It was not Love, not Love, that wrought this wrong;
  And yet—what evil shadow of this dark town
Could quench a soul so flame-like clean and strong,

Strike the young glory of his manhood down,
  Dead, like a dog, dead in a drunken brawl,
Dead for a phial of paint, a taffeta gown?

What if his blood were hot? High over all
  He heard, as in his song the world still hears,
Those angels on the burning heavenly wall

Who chant the thunder-music of the spheres.
  Yet—through the glory of his own young dream
Here did he meet that face, wet with strange tears,

Andromeda, with piteous face astream,
  Hailing him, Perseus. In her treacherous eyes
As in dark pools the mirrored stars will gleam,

Here did he see his own eternal skies;
  And here—she laughed, nor found the dream amiss;
But bade him pluck and eat—in Paradise.

Here did she hold him, broken up with bliss,
  Here, like a supple snake, around him coiled,
Here did she pluck his heart out with a kiss,

Here were the wings clipped and the glory soiled,
  Here adders coupled in the pure white shrine,
Here was the Wine spilt, and the Shew-bread spoiled.

Black was that feast, though he who poured the Wine
  Dreamed that he poured it in high sacrament.
Deep in her eyes he saw his own eyes shine,

Beheld Love's god-head and was well content.
  Subtly her hand struck the pure silver note,
The throbbing chord of passion that God meant

To swell the bliss of heaven. Round his young throat
  She wound her swarthy tresses; then, with eyes
Half mad to see their power, half mad to gloat,

Half mad to batten on their own devilries,
  And mark what heaven-born splendours they could quell,
She held him quivering in a mesh of lies,

And in soft broken speech began to tell—
  There as, against her heart, throbbing he lay—
The truth that hurled his soul from heaven to hell.

Quivering, she watched the subtle whip-lash flay
  The white flesh of the dreams of his pure youth;
Then sucked the blood and left them cold as clay.

Luxuriously she lashed him with the truth.
  Against his mouth her subtle mouth she set
To show, as through a mask, O, without ruth,

As through a cold clay mask (brackish and wet
  With what strange tears!) it was not his, not his,
The kiss that through his quivering lips she met.

Kissing him, "*Thus*," she whispered, "*did he kiss.*
  Ah, is the sweetness like a sword, then, sweet?
Last night—ah, kiss again—aching with bliss,

Thus was I made his own, from head to feet."
  —A sudden agony thro' his body swept
Tempestuously.—"*Our wedded pulses beat*

Like this and this; and then, at dawn, he slept."
  She laughed, pouting her lips against his cheek
To drink; and, as in answer, Marlowe wept.

As a dead man in dreams, he heard her speak.
  Clasped in the bitter grave of that sweet clay,
Wedded and one with it, he moaned. Too weak

Even to lift his head, sobbing, he lay.
  Then, slowly, as their breathings rose and fell,
He felt the storm of passion, far away,

Gather. The shuddering waves began to swell.
  And, through the menace of the thunder-roll,
The thin quick lightnings, thrilling through his hell,

Lightnings that hell itself could not control
  (Even while she strove to bow his neck anew)
Woke the great slumbering legions of his soul.

Sharp was that severance of the false and true,
  Sharp as a sword drawn from a shuddering wound.
But they, that were one flesh, were cloven in two.

Flesh leapt from clasping flesh, without a sound.
  He plucked his body from her white embrace,
And cast him down, and grovelled on the ground.

Yet, ere he went, he strove once more to trace,
  Deep in her eyes, the loveliness he knew;
Then—spat his hatred into her smiling face.

She clung to him. He flung her off. He drew
  His dagger, thumbed the blade, and laughed—"Poor punk!
What? Would you make me your own murderer, too?"

. . . . . .

"That was the day of our great feast," said Nash,
"Aboard the *Golden Hynde*. The grand old hulk
Was drawn up for the citizens' wonderment
At Deptford. Ay, Piers Penniless was there!
Soaked and besotted as I was, I saw
Everything. On her poop the minstrels played,
And round her sea-worn keel, like meadow-sweet
Curtseying round a lightning-blackened oak,

Prentices and their sweethearts, heel and toe,
Danced the brave English dances, clean and fresh
As May.
But in her broad gun-guarded waist
Once red with British blood, long tables groaned
For revellers not so worthy. Where her guns
Had raked the seas, barrels of ale were sprung,
Bestrid by roaring tipplers. Where at night
The storm-beat crew silently bowed their heads
With Drake before the King of Life and Death,
A strumpet wrestled with a mountebank
For pence, a loose-limbed Lais with a clown
Of Cherry Hilton. Leering at their lewd twists,
Cross-legged upon the deck, sluggish with sack,
Like a squat toad sat Puff . . .
Propped up against the bulwarks, at his side,
Archer, his apple-squire, hiccoughed a bawdy song.

Suddenly, through that orgy, with wild eyes,
Yet with her customary smile, O, there
I saw in daylight what Kit Marlowe saw
Through blinding mists, the face of his first love.
She stood before her paramour on the deck,
Cocking her painted head to right and left,
Her white teeth smiling, but her voice a hiss:
'Quickly,' she said to Archer, 'come away,
Or there'll be blood spilt!'
'Better blood than wine,'
Said Archer, struggling to his feet, 'but who,
Who would spill blood?'
'Marlowe!' she said.
Then Puff
Reeled to his feet. 'What, Kit, the cobbler's son?
The lad that broke his leg at the *Red Bull*,
Tamburlaine-Marlowe, he that would chain kings
To's chariot-wheel? What, is he rushing hither?
He would spill blood for Gloriana, hey?
O, my Belphœbe, you will crack my sides!
Was this the wench that shipped a thousand squires?
O, ho! But here he comes. Now, solemnly, lads,—
Now walk the angels on the walls of heaven
To entertain divine Zenocrate!'

And there stood Kit, high on the storm-scarred poop,
Against the sky, bare-headed. I saw his face,
Pale, innocent, just the clear face of that boy
Who walked to Cambridge with a bundle and stick,—
The little cobbler's son. Yet—there I caught
My only glimpse of how the sun-god looked,
And only for one moment.
When he saw
His mistress, his face whitened, and he shook.
Down to the deck he came, a poor weak man;
And yet—by God—the only man that day
In all our drunken crew.
'Come along, Kit,'
Cried Puff, 'we'll all be friends now, all take hands,
And dance—ha! ha!—the shaking of the sheets!'
Then Archer, shuffling a step, raised his cracked voice
In Kit's own song to a falsetto tune,
Snapping one hand, thus, over his head as he danced:—

'Come, live with me, and be my love,
And we will all the pleasures prove!' . . .

Puff reeled between, laughing. 'Damn you,' cried Kit.
And, catching the fat swine by his round soft throat,
Hurled him headlong, crashing across the tables,
To lie and groan in the red bilge of wine
That washed the scuppers.
Kit gave him not one glance.
'Archer,' he said in a whisper.
Instantly
A long thin rapier flashed in Archer's hand.
The ship was one wild uproar. Women screamed
And huddled together. A drunken clamorous ring
Seethed around Marlowe and his enemy.
Kit drew his dagger, slowly, and I knew
Blood would be spilt.
'Here, take my rapier, Kit!'
I cried across the crowd, seeing the lad
Was armed so slightly. But he did not hear.
I could not reach him.

All at once he leapt
Like a wounded tiger, past the rapier point
Straight at his enemy's throat. I saw his hand
Up-raised to strike! I heard a harlot's scream,
And, in mid-air, the hand stayed, quivering, white,
A frozen menace.
I saw a yellow claw
Twisting the dagger out of that frozen hand;
I saw his own steel in that yellow grip,
His own lost lightning raised to strike at him!
I saw it flash! I heard the driving grunt
Of him that struck! Then, with a shout, the crowd
Sundered, and through the gap, a blank red thing
Streaming with blood came the blind face of Kit,
Reeling, to me! And I, poor drunken I,
Held my arms wide for him. Here, on my breast,
With one great sob, he burst his heart and died."

. . . . . .

Nash ceased. And, far away down Friday Street,
The crowder with his fiddler wailed again:

"Blaspheming Tambolin must die
And Faustus meet his end.
Repent, repent, or presentlie
To hell ye must descend."

And, as in answer, Chapman slowly breathed
Those mightiest lines of Marlowe's own despair:

"Think'st thou that I who saw the face of God,
And tasted the eternal joys of heaven,
Am not tormented with ten thousand hells?"

"Ah, you have said it," said Nash, "and there you know
Why Kit desired your hand to crown his work.
He reverenced you as one whose temperate eyes
Austere and grave, could look him through and through;
One whose firm hand could grasp the reins of law
And guide those furious horses of the sun,
As Ben and Will can guide them, where you will.
His were, perchance, the noblest steeds of all,

And from their nostrils blew a fierier dawn
Above the world. That glory is his own;
But where he fell, he fell. Before his hand
Had learned to quell them, he was dashed to the earth.
'Tis yours to show that good men honoured him.
For, mark this, Chapman, since Kit Marlowe fell,
There will be fools that, in the name of Art,
Will wallow in the mire, crying 'I fall,
I fall from heaven!'—fools that have only heard
From earth, the rumour of those golden hooves
Far, far above them. Yes, you know the kind,
The fools that scorn Will for his lack of fire
Because he quells the storms they never knew,
And rides above the thunder; fools of Art
That skip and vex, like little vicious fleas,
Their only Helicon, some green madam's breast.
Art! Art! O, God, that I could send my soul,
In one last wave, from that night-hidden wreck,
Across the shores of all the years to be;
O, God, that like a crowder I might shake
Their blind dark casements with the pity of it,
Piers Penniless his ballad, a poor scrap,
That but for lack of time, and hope and pence,
He might have bettered! For a dead man's sake,
Thus would the wave break, thus the crowder cry:—

Dead, like a dog upon the road;
  Dead, for a harlot's kiss;
The Apollonian throat and brow,
The lyric lips, so silent now,
The flaming wings that heaven bestowed
  For loftier airs than this!

The sun-like eyes whose light and life
  Had gazed an angel's down,
That burning heart of honey and fire,
Quenched and dead for an apple-squire,
Quenched at the thrust of a mummer's knife,
  Dead—for a taffeta gown!

The wine that God had set apart,
The noblest wine of all,
Wine of the grapes that angels trod,
The vintage of the glory of God,
The crimson wine of that rich heart,
Spilt in a drunken brawl,

Poured out to make a steaming bath
That night in the Devil's Inn,
A steaming bath of living wine
Poured out for Circe and her swine,
A bath of blood for a harlot
To supple and sleek her skin.

And many a fool that finds it sweet
Through all the years to be,
Crowning a lie with Marlowe's fame,
Will ape the sin, will ape the shame,
Will ape our captain in defeat;
But—not in victory;

Till Art become a leaping-house,
And Death be crowned as Life,
And one wild jest outshine the soul
Of Truth . . . O, fool, is this your goal?
You are not our Kit Marlowe,
But the drunkard with the knife;

Not Marlowe, but the Jack-o'-Lent
That lured him o'er the fen!
O, ay, the tavern is in its place,
And the punk's painted smiling face,
But where is our Kit Marlowe
The man, the king of men?

Passion? You kiss the painted mouth,
The hand that clipped his wings,
The hand that into his heart she thrust
And tuned him to her whimpering lust,
And played upon his quivering youth
As a crowder plucks the strings.

But he who dared the thunder-roll,
Whose eagle-wings could soar,
Buffeting down the clouds of night,
To beat against the Light of Light,
That great God-blinded eagle-soul,
We shall not see him more."

V

THE COMPANION OF A MILE

THWACK! *Thwack!* One early dawn upon our door
I heard the bladder of some motley fool
Bouncing, and all the dusk of London shook
With bells! I leapt from bed,—had I forgotten?—
I flung my casement wide and craned my neck
Over the painted Mermaid. There he stood,
His right leg yellow and his left leg blue,
With jingling cap, a sheep-bell at his tail,
Wielding his eel-skin bladder,—*bang! thwack! bang!*—
Catching a comrade's head with the recoil
And skipping away! All Bread Street dimly burned
Like a reflected sky, green, red and white
With littered branches, ferns and hawthorn-clouds;
For, round Sir Fool, a frolic morrice-troop
Of players, poets, prentices, mad-cap queans,
Robins and Marians, coloured like the dawn,
And sparkling like the greenwood whence they came
With their fresh boughs all dewy from the dark,
Clamoured, *Come down! Come down, and let us in!*
High over these, I suddenly saw Sir Fool
Leap to a sign-board, swing to a conduit-head,
And perch there, gorgeous on the morning sky,
Tossing his crimson cockscomb to the blue
And crowing like Chanticleer, *Give them a rouse!*
Tickle it, tabourer! Nimbly, lasses, nimbly!
Tuck up your russet petticoats and dance!
Let the Cheape know it is the first of May!

And as I seized shirt, doublet and trunk-hose,
I saw the hobby-horse come cantering down,
A pasteboard steed, dappled a rosy white
Like peach-bloom, bridled with purple, bitted with gold,
A crimson foot-cloth on his royal flanks,
And, riding him, His Majesty of the May!
Round him the whole crowd frolicked with a shout,
And as I stumbled down the crooked stair
I heard them break into a dance and sing:—

SONG

I

Into the woods we'll trip and go,
Up and down and to and fro,
Under the moon to fetch in May,
And two by two till break of day,
A-maying,
A-playing,
For Love knows no gain-saying!
Wisdom trips not? Even so—
Come, young lovers, trip and go,
Trip and go.

II

Out of the woods we'll dance and sing
Under the morning-star of Spring,
Into the town with our fresh boughs
And knock at every sleeping house,
Not sighing,
Or crying,
Though Love knows no denying!
Then, round your summer queen and king,
Come, young lovers, dance and sing,
Dance and sing!

"*Chorus*," the great Fool tossed his gorgeous crest,
And lustily crew against the deepening dawn,
"*Chorus*," till all the Cheape caught the refrain,
And, with a double thunder of frolic feet,
Its ancient nut-brown tabors woke the Strand:—

A-maying,
A-playing,
For Love knows no gain-saying!
Wisdom trips not? Even so,—
Come, young lovers, trip and go,
Trip and go.

Into the Mermaid with a shout they rushed
As I shot back the bolts, and *bang*, *thwack*, *bang*,
The bladder bounced about me. What cared I?
This was all England's holy-day! "Come in,
My yellow-hammers," roared the Friar Tuck
Of this mad morrice, "come you into church,
My nightingales, my scraps of Lincoln green,
And hear my sermon!" On a window-seat
He stood, against the diamonded rich panes
In the old oak parlour and, throwing back his hood,
Who should it be but Ben, rare Ben himself?
The wild troup laughed around him, some a-sprawl
On tables, kicking parti-coloured heels,
Some with their Marians jigging on their knees,
And, in the front of all, the motley fool
Cross-legged upon the rushes.

O, I knew him,—
Will Kemp, the player, who danced from London town
To Norwich in nine days and was proclaimed
Freeman of Marchaunt Venturers and hedge-king
Of English morrice-dancery for ever!
His nine-days' wonder, through the countryside
Was hawked by every ballad-monger. Kemp
Raged at their shake-rag Muses. None but I
Guessed ever for what reason, since he chose
His anticks for himself and, in his games,
Was more than most May-fools fantastical.
I watched his thin face, as he rocked and crooned,

Shaking the squirrels' tails around his ears;
And, out of all the players I had seen,
His face was quickest through its clay to flash
The passing mood. Though not a muscle stirred,
The very skin of it seemed to flicker and gleam
With little summer lightnings of the soul
At every fleeting fancy. For a man
So quick to bleed at a pin-prick or to leap
Laughing through hell to save a butterfly,
This world was difficult; and perchance he found
In his fantastic games that open road
Which even Will Shakespeare only found at last
In motley and with some wild straws in his hair.
But "Drawer! drawer!" bellowed Friar Ben,
"Make ready a righteous breakfast while I preach;—
Tankards of nut-brown ale, and cold roast beef,
Cracknels, old cheese, flaunes, tarts and clotted cream.
Hath any a wish not circumscribed by these?"

"A white-pot custard, for my white-pot queen,"
Cried Kemp, waving his bauble, "mark this, boy,
A white-pot custard for my queen of May,—
She is not here, but that concerns not thee!—
A white-pot Mermaid custard, with a crust,
Lashings of cream, eggs, apple-pulse and spice,
A little sugar and manchet bread. Away!
Be swift!"

And as I bustled to and fro,
The Friar raised his big brown fists again
And preached in mockery of the Puritans
Who thought to strip the moonshine wings from Mab,
Tear down the May-poles, rout our English games,
And drive all beauty back into the sea.

Then laughter and chatter and clashing tankards drowned
All but their May-day jollity a-while.
But, as their breakfast ended, and I sank
Gasping upon a bench, there came still more
Poets and players crowding into the room;
And one—I only knew him as Sir John—

Waved a great ballad at Will Kemp and laughed,
"Atonement, Will, atonement!"
"What," groaned Kemp,
"Another penny poet? How many lies
Does *this* rogue tell? Sir, I have suffered much
From these Melpomenes and strawberry quills,
And think them better at their bloody lines
On *The Blue Lady*. Sir, they set to work
At seven o'clock in the morning, the same hour
That I, myself, that's *Cavaliero* Kemp,
With heels of feather and heart of cork, began
Frolickly footing, from the great Lord Mayor
Of London, tow'rds the worshipful Master Mayor
Of Norwich."
"Nay, Kemp, this is a May-day tune,
A morrice of country rhymes, made by a poet
Who thought it shame so worthy an act as thine
Should wither in oblivion if the Muse
With her Castalian showers could keep it green.
And while the fool nid-nodded all in time,
Sir John, in swinging measure, trolled this tale:—

I

With Georgie Sprat, my overseer, and Thomas Slye, my tabourer,
And William Bee, my courier, when dawn emblazed the skies,
I met a tall young butcher as I danced by little Sudbury,
Head-master o' morrice-dancers all, high headborough of hyes.

By Sudbury, by Sudbury, by little red-roofed Sudbury,
He wished to dance a mile with me! I made a courtly bow:
I fitted him with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor bells,
And "*Tickle your tabor, Tom,*" I cried, "*we're going to market now.*"

And rollicking down the lanes we dashed, and frolicking up
the hills we clashed,
And like a sail behind me flapped his great white frock
a-while,
Till, with a gasp, he sank and swore that he could dance with
me no more;
And—over the hedge a milk-maid laughed, *Not dance with
him a mile?*

"You lout!" she laughed, "I'll leave my pail, and dance with
him for cakes and ale!
I'll dance a mile for love," she laughed, "and win my wager,
too.
Your feet are shod and mine are bare; but when could leather
dance on air?
A milk-maid's feet can fall as fair and light as falling dew."

I fitted her with morrice-bells, with treble, bass and tenor
bells:
The fore-bells, as I linked them at her throat, how soft
they sang!
Green linnets in a golden nest, they chirped and trembled on
her breast,
And, faint as elfin blue-bells, at her nut-brown ankles rang.

I fitted her with morrice-bells that sweetened into woodbine
bells,
And trembled as I hung them there and crowned her sunny
brow:
"Strike up," she laughed, "my summer king!" And all her
bells began to ring,
And "*Tickle your tabor, Tom,*" I cried, "*we're going to
Sherwood now!*"

When cocks were crowing, and light was growing, and horns
were blowing, and milk-pails flowing,
We swam thro' waves of emerald gloom along a chestnut
aisle,
Then, up a shining hawthorn-lane, we sailed into the sun
again,
Will Kemp and his companion, his companion of a mile.

"Truer than most," snarled Kemp, "but mostly lies!
And why does he forget the miry lanes
By Brainford with thick woods on either side,
And the deep holes, where I could find no ease
But skipped up to my waist?" A crackling laugh
Broke from his lips which, if he had not worn
The cap and bells, would scarce have roused the mirth
Of good Sir John, who roundly echoed it.
Then waved his hand and said, "Nay, but he treats
Your morrice in the spirit of Lucian, Will,
Who thought that dancing was no mushroom growth,
But sprung from the beginning of the world
When Love persuaded earth, air, water, fire,
And all the jarring elements to move
In measure. Right to the heart of it, my lad,
The song goes, though the skin mislike you so."
"Nay, an there's more of it, I'll sing it, too!
'Tis a fine tale, Sir John, I have it by heart,
Although 'tis lies throughout." Up leapt Will Kemp,
And crouched and swayed, and swung his bauble round,
Making the measure as they trolled the tale,
Chanting alternately, each answering each.

II

The Fool

The tabor fainted far behind us, but her feet that day
They beat a rosier morrice o'er the fairy-circled green.

Sir John

And o'er a field of buttercups, a field of lambs and buttercups,
We danced along a cloth of gold, a summer king and queen!

The Fool

And straying we went, and swaying we went, with lambkins
round us playing we went;
Her face uplift to drink the sun, and not for me her smile,
We danced, a king and queen of May, upon a fleeting holy-
day,
But O, she'd won her wager, my companion of a mile!

Sir John

Her rosy lips they never spoke, though every rosy foot-fall broke
The dust, the dust to Eden-bloom; and, past the throbbing blue,
All ordered to her rhythmic feet, the stars were dancing with my sweet,
And all the world a morrice-dance!

The Fool

She knew not; but I knew!
Love like Amphion with his lyre, made all the elements conspire
To build His world of music. All in rhythmic rank and file,
I saw them in their cosmic dance, catch hands across, retire, advance,
For me and my companion, my companion of a mile!

Sir John

The little leaves on every tree, the rivers winding to the sea,
The swinging tides, the wheeling winds, the rolling heavens above,
Around the May-pole Igdrasil, they worked the Morrice-master's will,
Persuaded into measure by the all-creative Love.

That hour I saw, from depth to height, this wildering universe unite!
The lambs of God around us and His passion in every flower!

The Fool

His grandeur in the dust, His dust a blaze of blinding majesty,
And all His immortality in one poor mortal hour.

And Death was but a change of key in Life the golden melody,
And Time became Eternity, and Heaven a fleeting smile;
For all was each and each was all, and all a wedded unity,
Her heart in mine, and mine in my companion of a mile.

Thwack! Thwack! He whirled his bauble round about,
"This fellow beats them all," he cried, "the worst
Those others wrote was that I hopped from York
To Paris with a mortar on my head.
This fellow sends me leaping through the clouds
To buss the moon! The best is yet to come;
Strike up, Sir John! Ha! ha! You know no more?"
Kemp leapt upon a table. "Clear the way,
He cried, and with a great stamp of his foot
And a wild crackling laugh, drew all to hark.
"With hey and ho, through thick and thin,
The hobby-horse is forgotten.
But I must finish what I begin,
Tho' all the roads be rotten.
"By all those twenty thousand chariots, Ben,
Hear this true tale they shall! Now, let me see.
Where was Will Kemp? Bussing the moon's pale mouth?
Ah, yes!" He crouched above the listening throng,—
"*Good as a play*," I heard one whispering quean,—
And, waving his bauble, shuffling with his feet
In a dance that marked the time, he sank his voice
As if to breathe great secrets, and so sang:—

III

At Melford town, at Melford town, at little grey-roofed
Melford town,
A long mile from Sudbury, upon the village green,
We danced into a merry rout of country-folk that skipt about
A hobby-horse, a May-pole, and a laughing white-pot queen.

They thronged about us as we stayed, and there I gave my
sunshine maid
An English crown for cakes and ale—her dancing was so
true!
And "Nay," she said, "I danced my mile for love!" I
answered with a smile,
"'Tis but a silver token, lass, thou'st won that wager, too."

I took my leash of morrice-bells, my treble, bass and tenor
bells,
They pealed like distant marriage-bells! And up came
William Bee
With Georgie Sprat, my overseer, and Thomas Slye, my
tabourer,
"Farewell," she laughed, and vanished with a Suffolk
courtesie.
I leapt away to Rockland, and from Rockland on to Hing-
ham,
From Hingham on to Norwich, sirs! I hardly heard
a-while
The throngs that followed after, with their shouting and their
laughter,
For a shadow danced beside me, my companion of a mile!

At Norwich, by St. Giles his gate, I entered, and the Mayor
in state,
With all the rosy knights and squires for twenty miles about,
With trumpets and with minstrelsy, was waiting there to
welcome me;
And, as I skipt into the street, the City raised a shout.

They gave me what I did not seek. I fed on roasted swans a
week!
They pledged me in their malmsey, and they lined me
warm with ale!
They sleeked my skin with red-deer pies, and all that runs and
swims and flies;
But, through the clashing wine-cups, O, I heard her clanking
pail.

And, rising from his crimson chair, the worshipful and portly
Mayor
Bequeathed me forty shillings every year that I should live,
With five good angels in my hand that I might drink while I
could stand!
They gave me golden angels! What I lacked they could not
give.

They made Will Kemp, thenceforward, sirs, Freeman of
Marchaunt Venturers!
They hoped that I would dance again from Norwich up to
York;
Then they asked me, all together, had I met with right May
weather,
And they praised my heels of feather, and my heart, my
heart of cork.

. . . . . .

As I came home by Sudbury, by little red-roofed Sudbury,
I waited for my bare-foot maid, among her satin kine!
I heard a peal of wedding-bells, of treble, bass and tenor bells:
"Ring well," I cried, "this bridal morn! You soon shall
ring for mine!"

I found her foot-prints in the grass, just where she stood and
saw me pass.
I stood within her own sweet field and waited for my may.
I laughed. The dance has turned about! I stand within:
she'll pass without,
And—*down the road the wedding came, the road I danced that
day!*

I saw the wedding-folk go by, with laughter and with minstrelsy,
I gazed across her own sweet hedge, I caught her happy smile,
I saw the tall young butcher pass to little red-roofed Sudbury.
His bride upon his arm, my lost companion of a mile.

Down from his table leapt the motley Fool.
His bladder bounced from head to ducking head,
His crackling laugh rang high,—"Sir John, I danced
In February, and the song says May!
A fig for all your poets, liars all!
Away to Fenchurch Street, lasses and lads,
They hold high revel there this May-day morn.
Away!" The mad-cap throng echoed the cry.
He drove them with his bauble through the door;
Then, as the last gay kerchief fluttered out
He gave one little sharp sad lingering cry
As of a lute-string breaking. He turned back

And threw himself along a low dark bench;
His jingling cap was crumpled in his fist,
And, as he lay there, all along Cheapside
The happy voices of his comrades rang:—

Out of the woods we'll dance and sing
Under the morning-star of Spring,
Into the town with our fresh boughs
And knock at every sleeping house,
Not sighing,
Or crying,
Though Love knows no denying!
Then, round your summer queen and king,
Come, young lovers, dance and sing,
Dance and sing!

His motley shoulders heaved. I touched his arm,
"What ails you, sir?" He raised his thin white face,
Wet with the May-dew still. A few stray petals
Clung in his tangled hair. He leapt to his feet,
"'Twas February, but I danced, boy, danced
In May! Can you do this?" Forward he bent
Over his feet, and shuffled it, heel and toe,
Out of the Mermaid, singing his old song—

A-maying,
A-playing,
For Love knows no gain-saying!
Wisdom trips not? Even so,—
Come, young lovers, trip and go,
Trip and go.

Five minutes later, over the roaring Strand,
"*Chorus!*" I heard him crow, and half the town
Reeled into music under his crimson comb.

VI

BIG BEN

Gods, what a hubbub shook our cobwebs out
The day that Chapman, Marston and our Ben
Waited in Newgate for the hangman's hands.

Chapman and Marston had been flung there first
For some imagined insult to the Scots
In *Eastward Ho*, the play they wrote with Ben.
But Ben was famous now, and our brave law
Would fain have winked and passed the big man by.
The lesser men had straightway been condemned
To have their ears cut off, their noses slit,
With other tortures.
Ben had risen at that!
He gripped his cudgel, called for a quart of ale,
Then like Helvellyn with his rocky face
And mountain-belly, he surged along Cheapside,
Snorting with wrath, and rolled into the gaol,
To share the punishment.
"There is my mark!
'Tis not the first time you have branded me,"
Said our big Ben, and thrust his broad left thumb
Branded with T for Tyburn, into the face
Of every protest. "That's the mark you gave me
Because I killed my man in Spitalfields,
A duel honest as any your courtiers fight.
But I was no Fitzdotterel, bore no gules
And azure, robbed no silk-worms for my hose,
I was Ben Jonson, out of Annandale,
Bricklayer in common to the good Lord God.
You branded me. I am Ben Jonson still.
You cannot rub it out."
The Mermaid Inn
Buzzed like a hornet's nest, upon the day
Fixed for their mutilation. And the stings
Were ready, too; for rapiers flashed and clashed
Among the tankards. Dekker was there, and Nash,
Brome (Jonson's body-servant, whom he taught
His art of verse and, more than that, to love him,)
And half a dozen more. They planned to meet
The prisoners going to Tyburn, and attempt
A desperate rescue.
All at once we heard
A great gay song come marching down the street,
A single voice, and twenty marching men,
Then the full chorus, twenty voices strong:—

The prentice whistles at break of day
  All under fair roofs and towers,
When the old Cheape openeth every way
  Her little sweet inns like flowers;
And he sings like a lark, both early and late,
  To think, if his house take fire,
At the good *Green Dragon* in Bishopsgate
  He may drink to his heart's desire.

Chorus: Or sit at his ease in the old *Cross Keys*
  And drink to his heart's desire.

But I, as I walk by *Red Rose Lane*,
  Tho' it warmeth my heart to see
The Swan, The Golden Hynde, and *The Crane*,
  With the door set wide for me;
Tho' Signs like daffodils paint the strand
  When the thirsty bees begin,
Of all the good taverns in Engeland
  My choice is—*The Mermaid Inn.*

Chorus: There is much to be said for *The Saracen's Head*,
  But my choice is *The Mermaid Inn.*

Into the tavern they rushed, these roaring boys.
"Now broach your ripest and your best," they cried.
  "All's well! They are all released! They are on the way!
Old Camden and young Selden worked the trick.
Where is Dame Dimpling? Where's our jolly hostess?
Tell her the Mermaid Tavern will have guests:
We are sent to warn her. She must raid Cook's Row,
And make their ovens roar. Nobody dines
This day with old Duke Humphrey. Red-deer pies,
Castles of almond crust, a shield of brawn
Big as the nether millstone, barrels of wine,
Three roasted peacocks! Ben is on the way!"
Then all the rafters rang with song again:—

There was a Prince—long since, long since!—
  To East Cheape did resort,
For that he loved *The Blue Boar's Head*
  Far better than Crown or Court;

But old King Harry in Westminster
Hung up, for all to see,
Three bells of power in St. Stephen's Tower,
Yea, bells of a thousand and three.

Chorus: Three bells of power in a timber tower,
Thirty thousand and three.

For Harry the Fourth was a godly king
And loved great godly bells!
He bade them ring and he bade them swing
Till a man might hear nought else.
In every tavern it soured the sack
With discord and with din;
But they drowned it all in a madrigal
Like this, at *The Mermaid Inn.*

Chorus: They drowned it all in a madrigal
Like this, at *The Mermaid Inn.*

"But how did Selden work it?"—"Nobody knows.
They will be here anon. Better ask Will.
He's the magician!"—"Ah, here comes Dame Dimpling!"
And, into the rollicking chaos our good Dame
—A Dame of only two and thirty springs—
All lavender and roses and white kerchief,
Bustled, to lay the tables.
Fletcher flung
His arm around her waist and kissed her cheek.
But all she said was, "*One—two—three—four—five—*
Six at a pinch, in yonder window-seat."
"A health to our Dame Dimpling," Beaumont cried,
And Dekker, leaping on the old black settle,
Led all their tumult into a song again:—

What is the Mermaid's merriest toast?
Our hostess—good Dame Dimpling!
Who is it rules the Mermaid roast?
Who is it bangs the Mermaid host,
Tho' her hands be soft as her heart almost?
Dame Dimpling!

She stands at the board in her fresh blue gown
With the sleeves tucked up—Dame Dimpling!
She rolls the white dough up and down
And her pies are crisp, and her eyes are brown.
So—she is the Queen of all this town,—
Dame Dimpling!

Her sheets are white as black-thorn bloom,
White as her neck, Dame Dimpling!
Her lavender sprigs in the London gloom
Make every little bridal-room
A country nook of fresh perfume,—
Dame Dimpling!

She wears white lace on her dark brown hair:
And a rose on her breast, Dame Dimpling!
And who can show you a foot as fair
Or an ankle as neat when she climbs the stair,
Taper in hand, and head in the air,
And a rose in her cheek?—O, past compare,
Dame Dimpling!

"But don't forget those oyster-pies," cried Lyly.
"Nor the roast beef," roared Dekker. "Prove yourself
The Muse of meat and drink."
There was a shout
In Bread Street, and our windows all swung wide,
Six heads at each.
Nat Field bestrode our sign
And kissed the painted Mermaid on her lips,
Then waved his tankard.
"Here they come," he cried.
"Camden and Selden, Chapman and Marston, too,
And half Will's company with our big Ben
Riding upon their shoulders."
"Look!" cried Dekker,
"But where is Atlas now? O, let them have it!
A thumping chorus, lads! Let the roof crack!"
And all the Mermaid clashed and banged again
In thunderous measure to the marching tune
That rolled down Bread Street, forty voices strong:—

At *Ypres Inn*, by *Wring-uren Lane*,
  Old John of Gaunt would dine:
He scarce had opened an oyster or twain,
  Or drunk one flagon of wine,
When, all along the Vintry Ward,
  He heard the trumpets blow,
And a voice that roared—"If thou love thy lord,
  Tell John of Gaunt to go!"

Chorus: A great voice roared—"If thou love thy lord,
  Tell John of Gaunt to go!"

Then into the room rushed Haviland
  That fair fat Flemish host,
"They are marching hither with sword and brand,
  Ten thousand men—almost!
It is these oysters or thy sweet life,
  Thy blood or the best of the bin!"—
"Proud Pump, avaunt!" quoth John of Gaunt,
  "I will dine at *The Mermaid Inn!*"

Chorus: "Proud Pump, avaunt!" quoth John of Gaunt,
  "There is wine at *The Mermaid Inn!*"

And in came Ben like a great galleon poised
High on the white crest of a shouting wave,
And then the feast began. The fragrant steam
As from the kitchens of Olympus drew
A throng of ragged urchins to our doors.
Ben ordered them a castellated pie
That rolled a cloud around them where they sat
Munching upon the cobblestones. Our casements
Dripped with the golden dews of Helicon;
And, under the warm feast our cellarage
Gurgled and foamed in the delicious cool
With crimson freshets—
  "Tell us," cried Nat Field,
When pipes began to puff. "How did you work it?"
Camden chuckled and tugged his long white beard.
"Out of the mouth of babes," he said and shook
His head at Selden! "O, young man, young man,
There's a career before you! Selden did it.

Take my advice, my children. Make young Selden
Solicitor-general to the Mermaid Inn.
That rosy silken smile of his conceals
A scholar! Yes, that suckling lawyer there
Puts my grey beard to shame. His courteous airs
And silken manners hide the nimblest wit
That ever trimmed a sail to catch the wind
Of courtly favour. Mark my words now, Ben,
That youth will sail right up against the wind
By skilful tacking. But you run it fine,
Selden, you run it fine. Take my advice
And don't be too ironical, my boy,
Or even the King will see it."
He chuckled again.
"But tell them of your tractate!"
"Here it is,"
Quoth Selden, twisting a lighted paper spill,
Then, with his round cherubic face aglow
Lit his long silver pipe,
"Why, first," he said,
"Camden being Clarencieux King-at-arms,
He read the King this little tract I wrote
Against tobacco." And the Mermaid roared
With laughter. "Well, you went the way to hang
All three of them," cried Lyly, "and, as for Ben,
His Trinidado goes to bed with him."
"Green gosling, quack no more," Selden replied,
Smiling that rosy silken smile anew.
"The King's a *critic!* When have critics known
The poet from his creatures, God from me?
How many cite Polonius to their sons
And call it Shakespeare? Well, I took my text
From sundry creatures of our great big Ben,
And called it 'Jonson.'
Camden read it out
Without the flicker of an eye. His beard
Saved us, I think. The King admired his text.
'*There is a man,*' he read, '*lies at death's door*
Thro' taking of tobacco. Yesterday
He voided a bushel of soot.'

'God bless my soul,
A bushel of soot! Think of it!' said the King.
'The man who wrote those great and splendid words,'
Camden replied,—I had prepared his case
Carefully—'lies in Newgate prison, sire.
His nose and ears await the hangman's knife.'

'Ah,' said the shrewd King, goggling his great eyes
Cannily. 'Did he not defame the Scots?'
'That's true,' said Camden, like a man that hears
Truth for the first time. 'O ay, he defamed 'em,'
The King said, very wisely, once again.
'Ah, but,' says Camden, like a man that strives
With more than mortal wit, 'only such Scots
As flout your majesty, and take tobacco.
He is a Scot, himself, and hath the gift
Of preaching.' Then we gave him Jonson's lines
Against Virginia. '*Neither do thou lust*
After that tawny weed; for who can tell,
Before the gathering and the making up,
What alligarta may have spawned thereon,'
Or words to that effect.

'Magneeficent!'
Spluttered the King—'who knows? Who knows, indeed?
That's a grand touch, that Alligarta, Camden!'
'The Scot who wrote those great and splendid words,'
Said Camden, 'languishes in Newgate, sire.
His ears and nose—'

And there, as we arranged
With Inigo Jones, the ladies of the court
Assailed the King in tears. Their masque and ball
Would all be ruined. All their Grecian robes,
Procured at vast expense, were wasted now.
The masque was not half-written. Master Jones
Had lost his poets. They were all in gaol.
Their noses and their ears . . . .
'God bless my soul,'
Spluttered the King, goggling his eyes again,
'What d'you make of it, Camden?'—

'I should say
A Puritan plot, sire; for these justices—
Who love tobacco—use their law, it seems,
To flout your Majesty at every turn.
If this continue, sire, there'll not be left
A loyal ear or nose in all your realm.'
At that, our noble monarch well-nigh swooned.
He hunched his body, padded as it was
Against the assassin's knife, six inches deep
With great green quilts, wagged his enormous head,
Then, in a dozen words, he wooed destruction:
'It is presumption and a high contempt
In subjects to dispute what kings can do,'
He whimpered. 'Even as it is blasphemy
To thwart the will of God.'
He waved his hand,
And rose. 'These men must be released, at once!'
Then, as I think, to seek a safer place,
He waddled from the room, his rickety legs
Doubling beneath that great green feather-bed
He calls his 'person.'—I shall dream to-night
Of spiders, Camden.—But in half an hour,
Inigo Jones was armed with Right Divine
To save such ears and noses as the ball
Required for its perfection. Think of that!
And let this earthly ball remember, too,
That Chapman, Marston, and our great big Ben
Owe their poor adjuncts to—ten Grecian robes
And 'Jonson' on tobacco! England loves
Her poets, O, supremely, when they're dead."
"But Ben has narrowly escaped her love,"
Said Chapman gravely.
"What do you mean?" said Lodge.
And, as he spoke, there was a sudden hush.
A tall gaunt woman with great burning eyes,
Ethereally fierce, as might have looked
Cassandra in old age, stood at the door.
"Where is my Ben?" she said.
"Mother!" cried Ben.
He rose and caught her in his mighty arms.

Her labour-reddened, long-boned hands entwined
Behind his neck.
"She brought this to the gaol,"
Said Chapman quietly, tossing a phial across
To Camden. "And he meant to take it, too,
Before the hangman touched him. Half an hour
And you'd have been too late to save big Ben.
He has lived too much in ancient Rome to love
A slit nose and the pillory. He'd have wrapped
His purple round him like an emperor.
I think she had another for herself."
"There's Roman blood in both of them," said Dekker,
"Don't look. She is weeping now." And, while Ben held
That gaunt old body sobbing against his heart,
Dekker, to make her think they paid no heed,
Began to sing; and very softly now,
Full forty voices echoed the refrain:—

The Cardinal's Hat is a very good inn,
And so is *The Puritan's Head;*
But I know a sign of a Wine, a Wine
That is better when all is said.
It is whiter than Venus, redder than Mars,
It was old when the world begun;
For all good inns are moons or stars
But *The Mermaid* is their Sun.

Chorus: They are all alight like moons in the night,
But *The Mermaid* is their Sun.

Therefore, when priest or parson cries
That inns like flowers increase,
I say that mine inn is a church likewise,
And I say to them "Be at peace!"
An host may gather in dark St. Paul's
To salve their souls from sin;
But the Light may be where "two or three"
Drink Wine in *The Mermaid Inn.*

Chorus: The Light may be where "two or three"
Drink Wine in *The Mermaid Inn.*

VII

THE BURIAL OF A QUEEN

'Twas on an All Souls' Eve that our good Inn
—Whereof, for ten years now, myself was host—
Heard and took part in its most eerie tale.
It was a bitter night, and master Ben,
—His hair now flecked with grey, though youth still fired
His deep and ageless eyes,—in the old oak-chair,
Over the roaring hearth, puffed at his pipe;
A little sad, as often I found him now
Remembering vanished faces. Yet the years
Brought others round him. Wreaths of Heliochrise
Gleamed still in that great tribe of Benjamin,
Burned still across the malmsey and muscadel.
Chapman and Browne, Herrick,—a name like thyme
Crushed into sweetness by a bare-foot maid
Milking, at dewy dawn, in Elfin-land,—
These three came late, and sat in a little room
Aside, supping together, on one great pie,
Whereof both crust and coffin were prepared
By master Herrick's receipt, and all washed down
With mighty cups of sack. This left with Ben,
John Ford, wrapped in his cloak, brooding aloof,
Drayton and Lodge and Drummond of Hawthornden.
Suddenly, in the porch, I heard a sound
Of iron that grated on the flags. A spade
And pick came edging through the door.
"O, room!
Room for the master-craftsman," muttered Ford,
And grey old sexton Scarlet hobbled in.
He shuffled off the snow that clogged his boots,
—On my clean rushes!—brushed it from his cloak
Of Northern Russet, wiped his rheumatic knees,
Blew out his lanthorn, hung it on a nail,
Leaned his rude pick and spade against the wall,
Flung back his rough frieze hood, flapped his gaunt arms,
And called for ale.

"Come to the fire," said Lodge.
"Room for the wisest counsellor of kings,
The kindly sage that puts us all to bed,
And tucks us up beneath the grass-green quilt."
"Plenty of work, eh Timothy?" said Ben.
"Work? Where's my liquor? O, ay, there's work to spare,"
Old Scarlet croaked, then quaffed his creaming stoup,
While Ben said softly—"Pity you could not spare.
You and your Scythe-man, some of the golden lads
That I have seen here in the Mermaid Inn!"
Then, with a quiet smile he shook his head
And turned to master Drummond of Hawthornden.
"Well, songs are good; but flesh and blood are better.
The grey old tomb of Horace glows for me
Across the centuries, with one little fire
Lit by a girl's light hand." Then, under breath,
Yet with some passion, he murmured this brief rhyme:—

I

Dulce ridentem, laughing through the ages,
Dulce loquentem, O, fairer far to me,
Rarer than the wisdom of all his golden pages
Floats the happy laughter of his vanished Lalage.

II

Dulce loquentem,—we hear it and we know it.
Dulce ridentem,—so musical and low.
"Mightier than marble is my song!" Ah, did the poet
Know why little Lalage was mightier even so?

III

Dulce ridentem,—through all the years that sever,
Clear as o'er yon hawthorn hedge we heard her passing by,—
Lalagen amabo,—a song may live for ever
Dulce loquentem,—but Lalage must die.

"I'd like to learn that rhyme," the sexton said.
"I've a fine memory too. You start me now,
I'd keep it up all night with ancient ballads."
And then—a strange thing happened. I saw John Ford
"With folded arms and melancholy hat"
(As in our Mermaid jest he still would sit)
Watching old Scarlet like a man in trance.
The sexton gulped his ale and smacked his lips,
Then croaked again—"O, ay, there's work to spare,
We fills 'em faster than the spades can dig,"
And, all at once, the lights burned low and blue.
Ford leaned right forward, with his grim black eyes
Widening.
"Why, that's a marvellous ring!" he said,
And pointed to the sexton's gnarled old hand
Spread on the black oak-table like the claw
Of some great bird of prey. "A ruby worth
The ransom of a queen!" The fire leapt up!
The sexton stared at him;
Then stretched his hand out, with its blue-black nails,
Full in the light, a grim earth-coloured hand,
But bare as it was born.
"There was a ring!
I could have sworn it! Red as blood!" cried Ford.
And Ben and Lodge and Drummond of Hawthornden
All stared at him. For such a silent soul
Was master Ford that, when he suddenly spake,
It struck the rest as dumb as if the Sphinx
Had opened its cold stone lips. He would sit mute
Brooding, aloof, for hours, his cloak around him,
A staff between his knees, as if prepared
For a long journey, a lonely pilgrimage
To some dark tomb; a strange and sorrowful soul,
Yet not—as many thought him—harsh or hard,
But of a most kind patience. Though he wrote
In blood, they say, the blood came from his heart;
And all the sufferings of this world he took
To his own soul, and bade them pasture there·
Till out of his compassion, he became
A monument of bitterness. He rebelled;
And so fell short of that celestial height

Whereto the greatest only climb, who stand
By Shakespeare, and accept the Eternal Law.
These find, in law, firm footing for the soul,
The strength that binds the stars, and reins the sea,
The base of being, the pillars of the world,
The pledge of honour, the pure cord of love,
The form of truth, the golden floors of heaven.
These men discern a height beyond all heights,
A depth below all depths, and never an end
Without a pang beyond it, and a hope;
Without a heaven beyond it, and a hell.
For these, despair is like a bubble pricked,
An old romance to make young lovers weep.
For these, the law becomes a fiery road,
A Jacob's ladder through that vast abyss
Lacking no rung from realm to loftier realm,
Nor wanting one degree from dust to wings.
These, at the last, radiant with victory,
Lay their strong hands upon the wingèd steeds
And fiery chariots, and exult to hold,
Themselves, the throbbing reins, whereby they steer
The stormy splendours.
He, being less, rebelled,
Cried out for unreined steeds, and unruled stars,
An unprohibited ocean and a truth
Untrue; and the equal thunder of the law
Hurled him to night and chaos, who was born
To shine upon the forehead of the day.
And yet—the voice of darkness and despair
May speak for heaven where heaven would not be heard,
May fight for heaven where heaven would not prevail,
And the consummate splendour of that strife,
Swallowing up all discords, all defeat,
In one huge victory, harmonising all,
Make Lucifer, at last, at one with God.

There,—on that All Souls' Eve, you might have thought
A dead man spoke, to see how Drayton stared,
And Drummond started.
"You saw no ruby ring,"
The old sexton muttered sullenly. "If you did,

The worse for me, by all accounts. The lights
Burned low. You caught the firelight on my fist.
What was it like, this ring?"

"A band of gold,
And a great ruby, heart-shaped, fit to burn
Between the breasts of Laïs. Am I awake
Or dreaming?"

"Well,—that makes the second time!
There's many have said they saw it, out of jest,
To scare me. For the astrologer did say
The third time I should die. Now, did you see it?
Most likely someone's told you that old tale!
You hadn't heard it, now?"

Ford shook his head.
"What tale?" said Ben.

"O, you could make a book
About my life. I've talked with quick and dead,
And neither ghost nor flesh can fright me now!
I wish it was a ring, so's I could catch him,
And sell him; but I've never seen him yet.
A white witch told me, if I did, I'd go
Clink, just like that, to heaven or t'other place,
Whirled in a fiery chariot with ten steeds
The way Elijah went. For I have seen
So many mighty things that I must die
Mightily.

Well,—I came, sirs, to my craft
The day mine uncle Robert dug the grave
For good Queen Katharine, she whose heart was broke
By old King Harry, a very great while ago.
Maybe you've heard about my uncle, sirs?
He was far-famous for his grave-digging.
In depth, in speed, in neatness, he'd no match!
They've put a fine slab to his memory
In Peterborough Cathedral—*Robert Scarlet*,
Sexton for half a century, it says,
In Peterborough Cathedral, where he built
The last sad habitation for two queens,
And many hundreds of the common sort.
And now himself, who for so many built
Eternal habitations, others have buried.

Obiit anno ætatis, ninety-eight,
July the second, fifteen ninety-four.
We should do well, sir, with a slab like that,
Shouldn't we?" And the sexton leered at Lodge.
"Not many boasts a finer slab than that.
There's many a king done worse. Ah, well, you see,
He'd a fine record. Living to ninety-eight,
He buried generations of the poor,
A countless host, and thought no more of it
Than digging potatoes. He'd a lofty mind
That found no satisfaction in small deeds.
But from his burying of two queens he drew
A lively pleasure. Could he have buried a third,
It would indeed have crowned his old white hairs.
But he was famous, and he thought, perchance,
A third were mere vain-glory. So he died.
I helped him with the second."
The old man leered
To see the shaft go home.
Ben filled the stoup
With ale. "So that," quoth he, "began the tale
About this ruby ring?" "But who," said Lodge,
"Who was the second queen?"
"A famous queen,
And a great lover! When you hear her name,
Your hearts will leap. Her beauty passed the bounds
Of modesty, men say, yet—she died young!
We buried her at midnight. There were few
That knew it; for the high State Funeral
Was held upon the morrow, Lammas morn.
Anon you shall hear why. A strange thing that,—
To see the mourners weeping round a hearse
That held a dummy coffin. Stranger still
To see us lowering the true coffin down
By torchlight, with some few of her true friends,
In Peterborough Cathedral, all alone."
"Old as the world," said Ford. "It is the way
Of princes. Their true tears and smiles are seen
At dead of night, like ghosts raised from the grave!
And all the luxury of their brief, bright noon,
Cloaks but a dummy throne, a mask of life;

And, at the last, drapes a false catafalque,
Holding a vacant urn, a mask of death.
But tell, tell on!"
The sexton took a draught
Of ale and smacked his lips.
"Mine uncle lived
A mile or more from Peterborough, then.
And, past his cottage, in the dead of night,
Her royal coach came creeping through the lanes,
With scutcheons round it and no crowd to see,
And heralds carrying torches in their hands,
And none to admire, but him and me, and one,
A pedlar-poet, who lodged with us that week
And paid his lodging with a bunch of rhymes.
By these, he said, my uncle Robert's fame
Should live, as in a picture, till the crack
Of doom. My uncle thought that he should pay
Four-pence beside; but, when the man declared
The thought unworthy of these august events,
My uncle was abashed.
And, truth to tell,
The rhymes were mellow, though here and there he swerved
From truth to make them so. Nor would he change
'June' to 'July' for all that we could say.
'I never said the month was June,' he cried,
'And if I did, Shakespeare hath jumped an age!
Gods, will you hedge me round with thirty nights?
"June" rhymes with "moon"!' With that, he flung them down
And strode away like Lucifer, and was gone,
Before old Scarlet could approach again
The matter of that four-pence.
Yet his rhymes
Have caught the very colours of that night!
I can see through them,
Ay, just as through our cottage window-panes,
Can see the great black coach,
Carrying the dead queen past our garden-gate.
The roses bobbing and fluttering to and fro,
Hide, and yet show the more by hiding, half.
And, like smoked glass through which you see the sun,

The song shows truest when it blurs the truth.
This is the way it goes."
He rose to his feet,
Picked up his spade, and struck an attitude,
Leaning upon it. "I've got to feel my spade,
Or I'll forget it. This is the way I speak it.
Always." And, with a schoolboy's rigid face,
And eyes fixed on the rafters, he began,
Sing-song, the pedlar-poet's bunch of rhymes:—

As I went by the cattle-shed
The grey dew dimmed the grass,
And, under a twisted apple-tree,
Old Robin Scarlet stood by me.
"Keep watch! Keep watch to-night," he said,
"There's things 'ull come to pass.

"Keep watch until the moon has cleared
The thatch of yonder rick;
Then I'll come out of my cottage-door
To wait for the coach of a queen once more;
And—you'll say nothing of what you've heard,
But rise and follow me quick."

"And what 'ull I see if I keep your trust,
And wait and watch so late?"
"Pride," he said, "and Pomp," he said,
"Beauty to haunt you till you're dead,
And Glorious Dust that goes to dust,
Passing the white farm-gate.

"You are young and all for adventure, lad,
And the great tales to be told:
This night, before the clock strike one,
Your lordliest hour will all be done;
But you'll remember it and be glad,
In the days when you are old!"

All in the middle of the night,
My face was at the pane;
When, creeping out of his cottage-door,
To wait for the coach of a queen once more,
Old Scarlet, in the moon-light,
Beckoned to me again.

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,
Like Father Time for dole,
In Reading Tawny cloak and hood,
With mattock and with spade he stood,
And, far away to southward,
A bell began to toll.

He stood beneath a lilac-spray,
And never a word he said;
But, as I stole out of the house,
He pointed over the orchard boughs,
Where, not with dawn or sunset,
The Northern sky grew red.

I followed him, and half in fear,
To the old farm-gate again;
And, round the curve of the long white road,
I saw that the dew-dashed hedges glowed
Red with the grandeur drawing near,
And the torches of her train.

They carried her down with singing,
With singing sweet and low,
Slowly round the curve they came,
Twenty torches dropping flame,
The heralds that were bringing her
The way we all must go.

'Twas master William Dethick,
The Garter King of Arms,
Before her royal coach did ride,
With none to see his Coat of Pride,
For peace was on the countryside,
And sleep upon the farms;

Peace upon the red farm,
  Peace upon the grey,
Peace on the heavy orchard trees,
And little white-walled cottages,
Peace upon the wayside,
  And sleep upon the way.

So master William Dethick,
  With forty horse and men,
Like any common man and mean
Rode on before the Queen, the Queen,
And—only a wandering pedlar
  Could tell the tale again.

How, like a cloud of darkness,
  Between the torches moved
Four black steeds and a velvet pall
Crowned with the Crown Imperiall
And—on her shield—the lilies,
  The lilies that she loved.

Ah, stained and ever stainless
  Ah, white as her own hand,
White as the wonder of that brow,
Crowned with colder lilies now,
White on the velvet darkness,
  The lilies of her land!

The witch from over the water,
  The fay from over the foam,
The bride that rode thro' Edinbro' town
With satin shoes and a silken gown,
A queen, and a great king's daughter,—
  Thus they carried her home,

With torches and with scutcheons,
  Unhonoured and unseen,
With the lilies of France in the wind a-stir,
And the Lion of Scotland over her,
Darkly, in the dead of night,
  They carried the Queen, the Queen.

The sexton paused and took a draught of ale.
"'Twas there," he said, "I joined 'em at the gate,
My uncle and the pedlar. What they sang,
The little shadowy throng of men that walked
Behind the scutcheoned coach with bare bent heads
I know not; but 'twas very soft and low.
They walked behind the rest, like shadows flung
Behind the torch-light, from that strange dark hearse.
And, some said, afterwards, they were the ghosts
Of lovers that this queen had brought to death.
A foolish thought it seemed to me, and yet
Like the night-wind they sang. And there was one
An olive-coloured man,—the pedlar said
Was like a certain foreigner that she loved,
One Chastelárd, a wild French poet of hers.
Also the pedlar thought they sang 'farewell'
In words like this, and that the words in French
Were written by the hapless Queen herself,
When as a girl she left the vines of France
For Scotland and the halls of Holyrood:—

I

Though thy hands have plied their trade
Eighty years without a rest,
Robin Scarlet, never thy spade
Built a house for such a guest!
Carry her where, in earliest June,
All the whitest hawthorns blow;
Carry her under the midnight moon,
Singing very soft and low.
Slow between the low green larches, carry the lovely lady
sleeping,
Past the low white moon-lit farms, along the lilac-shadowed
way!
Carry her through the summer darkness, weeping, weeping,
weeping, weeping!
Answering only, to any that ask you, whence ye carry her,—
Fotheringhay!

II

She was gayer than a child!
—*Let your torches droop for sorrow.*—
Laughter in her eyes ran wild!
—*Carry her down to Peterboro'.*—
Words were kisses in her mouth!
—*Let no word of blame be spoken.*—
She was Queen of all the South!
—*In the North, her heart was broken.*—
They should have left her in her vineyards, left her heart to her land's own keeping,
Left her white breast room to breathe, and left her light foot free to dance.
Out of the cold grey Northern mists, we carry her weeping, weeping, weeping,—
O, ma patrie,
La plus chérie,
Adieu, plaisant pays de France!

III

Many a red heart died to beat
—*Music swelled in Holyrood!*—
Once, beneath her fair white feet.
—*Now the floors may rot with blood*—
She was young and her deep hair—
—*Wind and rain were all her fate!*—
Trapped young Love as in a snare.
—*And the wind's a sword in the Canongate!*
Edinboro'!
Edinboro'!
Music built the towers of Troy, but thy grey walls are built of sorrow!
Wind-swept hills, and sorrowful glens, of thrifty sowing and iron reaping,
What if her foot were fair as a sunbeam, how should it touch or melt your snows?
What if her hair were a silken mesh?
Hands of steel can deal hard blows,
Iron breast-plates bruise fair flesh!

Carry her southward, palled in purple,
Weeping, weeping, weeping, weeping,
What had their rocks to do with roses? Body and soul she was
all one rose.

Thus, through the summer night, slowly they went,
We three behind,—the pedlar-poet and I,
And Robin Scarlet. The moving flare that ringed
The escutcheoned hearse, lit every leaf distinct
Along the hedges and woke the sleeping birds,
But drew no watchers from the drowsier farms.
Thus, through a world of innocence and sleep,
We brought her to the doors of her last home,
In Peterborough Cathedral. Round her tomb
They stood, in the huge gloom of those old aisles,
The heralds with their torches, but their light
Struggled in vain with that tremendous dark.
Their ring of smoky red could only show
A few sad faces round the purple pall,
The wings of a stone angel overhead,
The base of three great pillars, and, fitfully,
Faint as the phosphorus glowing in some old vault,
One little slab of marble, far away.
Yet, or the darkness, or the pedlar's words
Had made me fanciful, I thought I saw
Bowed shadows praying in those unplumbed aisles,
Nay, dimly heard them weeping, in a grief
That still was built of silence, like the drip
Of water from a frozen fountain-head.
We laid her in her grave. We closed the tomb.
With echoing footsteps all the funeral went;
And I went last to close and lock the doors;
Last, and half frightened of the enormous gloom
That rolled along behind me as one by one
The torches vanished. O, I was glad to see
The moonlight on the kind turf-mounds again.
But, as I turned the key, a quivering hand
Was laid upon my arm. I turned and saw
That foreigner with the olive-coloured face.
From head to foot he shivered, as with cold.
He drew me into the shadows of the porch.

'Come back with me,' he whispered, and slid his hand
—Like ice it was!—along my wrist, and slipped
A ring upon my finger, muttering quick,
As in a burning fever, 'All the wealth
Of Eldorado for one hour! Come back!
I must go back and see her face again!
I was not there, not there, the day she—died.
You'll help me with the coffin. Not a soul
Will know. Come back! One moment, only one!'
I thought the man was mad, and plucked my hand
Away from him. He caught me by the sleeve,
And sank upon his knees, lifting his face
Most piteously to mine. 'One moment! See!
I loved her!'
I saw the moonlight glisten on his tears,
Great, long, slow tears they were; and then—my God—
As his face lifted and his head sank back
Beseeching me—I saw a crimson thread
Circling his throat, as though the headsman's axe
Had cloven it with one blow, so shrewd, so keen,
The head had slipped not from the trunk.
I gasped;
And, as he pleaded, stretching his head back,
The wound, O like a second awful mouth,
The wound began to gape.
I tore my cloak
Out of his clutch. My keys fell with a clash.
I left them where they lay, and with a shout
I dashed into the broad white empty road.
There was no soul in sight. Sweating with fear
I hastened home, not daring to look back;
But as I turned the corner, I heard the clang
Of those great doors, and knew he had entered in.

Not till I saw before me in the lane
The pedlar and my uncle did I halt
And look at that which clasped my finger still
As with a band of ice.
My hand was bare!
I stared at it and rubbed it. Then I thought
I had been dreaming. There had been no ring!

The poor man I had left there in the porch,
Being a Frenchman, talked a little wild;
But only wished to look upon her grave.
And I—I was the madman! So I said
Nothing. But all the same, for all my thoughts,
I'd not go back that night to find the keys,
No, not for all the rubies in the crown
Of Prester John.

. . . . . .

The high State Funeral
Was held on Lammas Day. A wondrous sight
For Peterborough! For myself, I found
Small satisfaction in a catafalque
That carried a dummy coffin. None the less,
The pedlar thought that as a Solemn Masque,
Or Piece of Purple Pomp, the thing was good,
And worthy of a picture in his rhymes;
The more because he said it shadowed forth
The ironic face of Death.

The Masque, indeed
Began before we buried her. For a host
Of Mourners—Lords and Ladies—on Lammas eve
Panting with eagerness of pride and place,
Arrived in readiness for the morrow's pomp,
And at the Bishop's Palace they found prepared
A mighty supper for them, where they sat
All at one table. In a Chamber hung
With scutcheons and black cloth, they drank red wine
And feasted, while the torches and the Queen
Crept through the darkness of Northampton lanes.

At seven o'clock on Lammas Morn they woke,
After the Queen was buried; and at eight
The Masque set forth, thus pictured in the rhymes
With tolling bells, which on the pedlar's lips
Had more than paid his lodging: Thus he spake it,
Slowly, sounding the rhymes like solemn bells,
And tolling, in between, with lingering tongue:—

Toll!—From the Palace the Releevants creep,—
A hundred poor old women, nigh their end,
Wearing their black cloth gowns, and on each head
An ell of snow-white holland which, some said,
Afterwards they might keep,
—*Ah, Toll!*—with nine new shillings each to spend,
For all the trouble that they had, and all
The sorrow of walking to this funeral.

Toll!—And the Mourning Cloaks in purple streamed
Following, a long procession, two by two,
Her Household first. With these, Monsieur du Preau
Her French Confessor, unafraid to show
The golden Cross that gleamed
About his neck, warned what the crowd might do
Said *I will wear it, though I die for it!*
So subtle in malice was that Jesuit.

Toll!—Sir George Savile in his Mourner's Gown
Carried the solemn Cross upon a Field
Azure, and under it by a streamer borne
Upon a field of Gules, an Unicorn
Argent and, lower down,
A scrolled device upon a blazoned shield,
Which seemed to say—I AM SILENT TILL THE END!—
Toll! Toll!—IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND!

Toll!—and a hundred poor old men went by,
Followed by two great Bishops.—*Toll, ah toll!*—
Then, with White Staves and Gowns, four noble lords;
Then sixteen Scots and Frenchmen with drawn swords;
Then, with a Bannerol,
Sir Andrew Noel, lifting to the sky
The Great Red Lion. Then the Crown and Crest
Borne by a Herald on his glittering breast.

And now—ah now, indeed, the deep bell tolls—
That empty Coffin, with its velvet pall,
Borne by six Gentlemen, under a canopy
Of purple, lifted by four knights, goes by.

The Crown Imperial
Burns on the Coffin-head. Four Bannerols
On either side, uplifted by four squires,
Roll on the wind their rich heraldic fires.
Toll! The Chief Mourner—the fair Russell!—*toll!*—
Countess of Bedford—*toll!*—they bring her now,
Weeping under a purple Cloth of State,
Till, halting there before the Minister Gate,
Having in her control
The fair White Staves of office, with a bow
She gives them to her two great Earls again,
Then sweeps them onward in her mournful train.

Toll! At the high Cathedral door the Quires
Meet them and lead them, singing all the while
A mighty *Miserere* for her soul!
Then, as the rolling organ—*toll, ah toll!*—
Floods every glimmering aisle
With ocean-thunders, all those knights and squires
Bring the false Coffin to the central nave
And set it in the Catafalque o'er her grave.

The Catafalque was made in Field-bed wise
Valanced with midnight purple, fringed with gold:
All the Chief Mourners on dark thrones were set
Within it, as jewels in some huge carcanet:
Above was this device
IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND, inscrolled
Round the rich Arms of Scotland, as to say
"Man judged me. I abide the Judgment Day."

The sexton paused anew. All looked at him,
And at his wrinkled, grim, earth-coloured hand,
As if, in that dim light, beclouded now
With blue tobacco-smoke, they thought to see
The smouldering ruby again.
"Ye know," he said,
"How master William Wickham preached that day?"
Ford nodded. "I have heard of it. He showed
Subtly, O very subtly, after his kind,

That the white Body of Beauty such as hers
Was in itself Papistical, a feast,
A fast, an incense, a burnt-offering,
And an Abomination in the sight
Of all true Protestants. Why, her very name
Was Mary!"

"Ay, that's true, that's very true!"
The sexton mused. "Now that's a strange deep thought!
The Bishop missed a text in missing that.
Her name, indeed, was Mary!"

"Did you find
Your keys again?" "Ay, sir, I found them!" "Where?"
"Strange you should ask me that! After the throng
Departed, and the Nobles were at feast,
All in the Bishop's Palace—a great feast
And worthy of their sorrow—I came back
Carrying my uncle's second bunch of keys
To lock the doors and search, too, for mine own.
'Twas growing dusk already, and as I thrust
The key into the lock, the great grey porch
Grew cold upon me, like a tomb.

I pushed
Hard at the key—then stopped—with all my flesh
Freezing, and half in mind to fly; for, sirs,
The door was locked already, and—*from within!*
I drew the key forth quietly and stepped back
Into the Churchyard, where the graves were warm
With sunset still, and the blunt carven stones
Lengthened their homely shadows, out and out,
To Everlasting. Then I plucked up heart,
Seeing the footprints of that mighty Masque
Along the pebbled path. A queer thought came
Into my head that all the world without
Was but a Masque, and I was creeping back,
Back from the Mourner's Feast to Truth again.
Yet—I grew bold, and tried the Southern door.
'Twas locked, but held no key on the inner side
To foil my own, and softly, softly, click,
I turned it, and with heart, sirs, in my mouth,
Pushed back the studded door and entered in . . .
Stepped straight out of the world, I might have said,

Out of the dusk into a night so deep,
So dark, I trembled like a child. . . .
And then
I was aware, sirs, of a great sweet wave
Of incense. All the gloom was heavy with it,
As if her Papist Household had returned
To pray for her poor soul; and, my fear went.
But either that strange incense weighed me down
Or else from being sorely over-tasked,
A languor came upon me, and sitting there
To breathe a moment, in a velvet stall,
I closed mine eyes.
A moment, and no more,
For then I heard a rustling in the nave,
And opened them; and, very far away,
As if across the world, in Rome herself,
I saw twelve tapers in the solemn East,
And saw, or thought I saw, cowled figures kneel
Before them, in an incense-cloud.
And then,
Maybe the sunset deepened in the world
Of masques without—clear proof that I had closed
Mine eyes but for a moment, sirs, I saw
As if across a world-without-end tomb,
A tiny jewelled glow of crimson panes
Darkening and brightening with the West.
And then,
Then I saw something more—Queen Mary's vault,
And—it was open! . . .
Then, I heard a voice,
A strange deep broken voice, whispering love
In soft French words, that clasped and clung like hands;
And then—two shadows passed against the West,
Two blurs of black against that crimson stain,
Slowly, O very slowly, with bowed heads,
Leaning together, and vanished into the dark
Beyond the Catafalque.
Then—I heard him pray,—
And knew him for the man that prayed to me,—
Pray as a man prays for his love's last breath!
And then, O sirs, it caught me by the throat,

And I, too, dropped upon my knees and prayed;
For, as in answer to his prayer, there came
A moan of music, a mighty shuddering sound
From the great organ, a sound that rose and fell
Like seas in anger, very far away;
And then a peal of thunder, and then it seemed,
As if the graves were giving up their dead,
A great cowled host of shadows rose and sang:—

Dies iræ, dies illâ
Solvet sæclum in favilla,
Teste David cum Sibylla.

I heard her sad, sad, little, broken voice,
Out in the darkness. 'Ay, and David, too,
His blood is on the floors of Holyrood,
To speak for me.' Then that great ocean-sound
Swelled to a thunder again, and heaven and earth
Shrivelled away; and in that huge slow hymn
Chariots were driven forth in flaming rows,
And terrible trumpets blown from deep to deep.

And then, ah then, the heart of heaven was hushed,
And—in the hush—it seemed an angel wept,
Another Mary wept, and gathering up
All our poor wounded, weary, way-worn world,
Even as a Mother gathers up her babe,
Soothed it against her breast, and rained her tears
On the pierced feet of God, and melted Him
To pity, and over His feet poured her deep hair.
The music died away. The shadows knelt.
And then—I heard a rustling nigh the tomb,
And heard—and heard—or dreamed I heard—farewells.
Farewells for everlasting, deep farewells,
Bitter as blood, darker than any death.
And, at the last, as in a kiss, one breath,
One agony of sweetness, like a sword
For sharpness, drawn along a soft white throat;
And, for its terrible sweetness, like a sigh
Across great waters, very far away,—
Sweetheart!

And then, like doors, like world-without-end doors
That shut for Everlasting, came a clang,
And ringing, echoing, through the echo of it,
One terrible cry that plucked my heart-strings out,
Mary! And on the closed and silent tomb,
Where there were two, one shuddering shadow lay,
And then—I, too,—reeled, swooned and knew no more.

Sirs, when I woke, there was a broad bright shaft
Of moonlight, slanting through an Eastern pane
Full on her tomb and that black Catafalque.
And on the tomb there lay—my bunch of keys!
I struggled to my feet,
Ashamed of my wild fancies, like a man
Awakening from a drunken dream. And yet,
When I picked up the keys, although that storm
Of terror had all blown by and left me calm,
I lifted up mine eyes to see the scroll
Round the rich crest of that dark canopy,
IN MY DEFENCE, GOD ME DEFEND. The moon
Struck full upon it; and, as I turned and went,
God help me, sirs, though I were loyal enough
To good Queen Bess, I could not help but say,
Amen!
And yet, methought it was not I that spake,
But some deep soul that used me for a mask,
A soul that rose up in this hollow shell
Like dark sea-tides flooding an empty cave.
I could not help but say with my poor lips,
Amen! Amen!

Sirs, 'tis a terrible thing
To move in great events. Since that strange night
I have not been as other men. The tides
Would rise in this dark cave"—he tapped his skull—
"Deep tides, I know not whence; and when they rose
My friends looked strangely upon me and stood aloof.
And once, my uncle said to me—indeed,
It troubled me strangely,—'Timothy,' he said,
'Thou art translated! I could well believe
Thou art two men, whereof the one's a fool,
The other a prophet. Or else, beneath thy skin

There lurks a changeling! What hath come to thee?'
And then, sirs, then—well I remember it!
'Twas on a summer eve, and we walked home
Between high ghostly hedges white with may—
And uncle Robin, in his holy-day suit
Of Reading Tawny, felt his old heart swell
With pride in his great memories. He began
Chanting the pedlar's tune, keeping the time
Thus, jingle, jingle, slowly, with his keys:—

I

Douglas, in the moonless night
  —*Muffled oars on blue Loch Leven!*—
Took her hand, a flake of white
  —*Beauty slides the bolts of heaven.*—
Little white hand, like a flake of snow,
  When they saw it, his Highland crew
Swung together and murmured low,
  "Douglas, wilt *thou* die then, too?"
And the pine trees whispered, weeping,
  "*Douglas, Douglas, tender and true!*
Little white hand like a tender moonbeam, soon shall you
  set the broadswords leaping.
It is the Queen, the Queen!" they whispered, watching
  her soar to the saddle anew.
"There will be trumpets blown in the mountains, a mist
  of blood on the heather, and weeping,
Weeping, weeping, and *thou*, too, dead for her, Douglas,
  Douglas, tender and true."

II

Carry the queenly lass along!
  —*Cold she lies, cold and dead,*—
She whose laughter was a song,
  —*Lapped around with sheets of lead!*—
She whose blood was wine of the South,
  —*Light her down to a couch of clay!*—
And a royal rose her mouth,
  And her body made of may!

—Lift your torches, weeping, weeping,
Light her down to a couch of clay.
They should have left her in her vineyards, left her heart
to her land's own keeping,
Left her white breast room to breathe, and left her light
foot free to dance!

Hush! Between the solemn pinewoods, carry the lovely lady
sleeping,
Out of the cold grey Northern mists, with banner and
scutcheon, plume, and lance,
Carry her southward, palled in purple, weeping, weeping,
weeping, weeping,—
O, ma patrie,
La plus chérie,
Adieu, plaisant pays de France!

Well, sirs, that dark tide rose within my brain!
I snatched his keys and flung them over the hedge,
Then flung myself down on a bank of ferns
And wept and wept and wept.
It puzzled him.
Perchance he feared my mind was going and yet,
O, sirs, if you consider it rightly now,
With all those ages knocking at his doors,
With all that custom clamouring for his care,
Is it so strange a grave-digger should weep?
Well—he was kind enough and heaped my plate
That night at supper.
But I could never dig my graves at ease
In Peterborough Churchyard. So I came
To London—to St. Mary Magdalen's.
And thus, I chanced to drink my ale one night
Here in the Mermaid Inn. 'Twas All Souls' Eve,
And, on that bench, where master Ford now sits
Was master Shakespeare—
Well, the lights burned low,
And just like master Ford to-night he leaned
Suddenly forward. 'Timothy,' he said,
'That's a most marvellous ruby!'

My blood froze!
I stretched my hand out bare as it was born;
And he said nothing, only looked at me.
Then, seeing my pipe was empty, he bade me fill
And lit it for me.
Peach, the astrologer,
Was living then; and that same night I went
And told him all my trouble about this ring.
He took my hand in his, and held it—thus—
Then looked into my face and said this rhyme:—

The ruby ring, that only three
While Time and Tide go by, shall see,
Weds your hand to history.

Honour and pride the first shall lend;
The second shall give you gold to spend;
The third—shall warn you of your end.

Peach was a rogue, some say, and yet he spake
Most truly about the first," the sexton mused,
"For master Shakespeare, though they say in youth
Outside the theatres, he would hold your horse
For pence, prospered at last, bought a fine house
In Stratford, lived there like a squire, they say.
And here, here he would sit, for all the world
As he were but a poet! God bless us all,
And then—to think!—he rose to be a squire!
A deep one, masters! Well, he lit my pipe!"
"Why did they bury such a queen by night?"
Said Ford. "Kings might have wept for her. Did Death
Play epicure and glutton that so few
Were bidden to such a feast. Once on a time,
I could have wept, myself, to hear a tale
Of beauty buried in the dark. And hers
Was loveliness, far, far beyond the common!
Such beauty should be marble to the touch
Of time, and clad in purple to amaze
The moth. But she was kind and soft and fair,
A woman, and so she died. But, why the dark?"

"Sir, they gave out the coffin was too heavy
For gentlemen to bear!"—"For kings to bear?"
Ford flashed at him. The sexton shook his head,—
"Nay! Gentlemen to bear! But—the true cause—
Ah, sir, 'tis unbelievable, even to me,
A sexton, for a queen so fair of face!
And all her beds, even as the pedlar said,
Breathing Arabia, sirs, her walls all hung
With woven purple wonders and great tales
Of amorous gods, and mighty mirrors, too,
Imaging her own softness, night and dawn,
When through her sumptuous hair she drew the combs;
And like one great white rose-leaf half her breast
Shone through it, firm as ivory."
"Ay," said Lodge,
Murmuring his own rich music under breath,
"*About her neck did all the graces throng,*
And lay such baits as did entangle death."
"Well, sir, the weather being hot, they feared
She would not hold the burying!" . . .
"In some sort,"
Ford answered slowly, "if your tale be true,
She did not hold it. Many a knightly crest
Will bend yet o'er the ghost of that small hand."

There was a hush, broken by Ben at last,
Who turned to Ford—"How now, my golden lad?
The astrologer's dead hand is on thy purse!"

Ford laughed, grimly, and flung an angel down.
"Well, cause or consequence, rhyme or no rhyme,
There is thy gold. I will not break the spell,
Or thou mayst live to bury us one and all!"
"And, if I live so long," the old man replied,
Lighting his lanthorn, "you may trust me, sirs,
Mine Inn is quiet, and I can find you beds
Where Queens might sleep all night and never move.
Good-night, sirs, and God bless you, one and all."
He shouldered pick and spade. I opened the door.
The snow blew in, and, as he shuffled out,
There, in the strait dark passage, I could swear

I saw a spark of red upon his hand,
Like a great smouldering ruby.
I gasped. He stopped.
He peered at me.
"Twice in a night," he said.
"Nothing," I answered, "only the lanthorn-light."
He shook his head. "I'll tell you something more!
There's nothing, nothing now in life or death
That frightens me. Ah, things used to frighten me.
But never now. I thought I had ten years;
But if the warning comes and says '*Thou fool,*
This night!' Why, then, I'm ready."
I watched him go,
With glimmering lanthorn up the narrow street,
Like one that walked upon the clouds, through snow
That seemed to mix the City with the skies.

On Christmas Eve we heard that he was dead.

VIII

FLOS MERCATORUM

Flos Mercatorum! On that night of nights
We drew from out our Mermaid cellarage
All the old glory of London in one cask
Of magic vintage. Never a city on earth—
Rome, Paris, Florence, Bagdad—held for Ben
The colours of old London; and, that night,
We staved them like a wine, and drank, drank deep!

'Twas Master Heywood, whom the Mermaid Inn
Had dubbed our London laureate, hauled the cask
Out of its ancient harbourage. "Ben," he cried,
Bustling into the room with Dekker and Brome,
"The prentices are up!" Ben raised his head
Out of the chimney-corner where he drowsed,
And listened, reaching slowly for his pipe.

"*Clerk of the Bow Bell,*" all along the Cheape
There came a shout that swelled into a roar.
"What! Will they storm the Mermaid?" Heywood laughed,
"They are turning into Bread Street!"
Down they came!
We heard them hooting round the poor old Clerk—
"Clubs! Clubs! The rogue would have us work all night!
He rang ten minutes late! Fifteen, by Paul's!"
And over the hubbub rose, like a thin bell,
The Clerk's entreaty—"Now, good boys, good boys,
Children of Cheape, be still, I do beseech you!
I took some forty winks, but then . . ." A roar
Of wrathful laughter drowned him—"Forty winks!
Remember Black May-day! We'll make you wink!"
There was a scuffle, and into the tavern rushed
Gregory Clopton, Clerk of the Bow Bell,—
A tall thin man, with yellow hair a-stream,
And blazing eyes.
"Hide me," he clamoured, "quick!
These picaroons will murder me!"
I closed
The thick oak doors against the coloured storm
Of prentices in red and green and ray,
Saffron and Reading tawny. Twenty clubs
Drubbed on the panels as I barred them out;
And even our walls and shutters could not drown
Their song that, like a mocking peal of bells,
Under our windows, made all Bread Street ring:—

"Clerk of the Bow Bell,
With the yellow locks,
For thy late ringing
Thy head shall have knocks!"

Then Heywood, seeing the Clerk was all a-quake,
Went to an upper casement that o'er-looked
The whole of Bread Street. Heywood knew their ways,
And parleyed with them till their anger turned
To shouts of merriment. Then, like one deep bell
His voice rang out, in answer to their peal:—

"Children of Cheape,
Hold you all still!
You shall have Bow Bell
Rung at your will!"

Loudly they cheered him. Courteously he bowed,
Then firmly shut the window; and, ere I filled
His cup with sack again, the crowd had gone.

"My clochard, sirs, is warm," quavered the Clerk.
"I do confess I took some forty winks!
They are good lads, our prentices of Cheape,
But hasty!"

"Wine!" said Ben. He filled a cup
And thrust it into Gregory's trembling hands.
"Yours is a task," said Dekker, "a great task!
You sit among the gods, a lord of time,
Measuring out the pulse of London's heart."

"Yea, sir, above the hours and days and years,
I sometimes think. 'Tis a great Bell—the Bow!
And hath been, since the days of Whittington."

"The good old days," growled Ben. "Both good and bad
Were measured by my Bell," the Clerk replied.
And, while he spoke, warmed by the wine, his voice
Mellowed and floated up and down the scale
As if the music of the London bells
Lingered upon his tongue. "I know them all,
And love them, all the voices of the bells.

Flos Mercatorum! That's the Bell of Bow
Remembering Richard Whittington. You should hear
The bells of London when they tell his tale.
Once, after hearing them, I wrote it down.
I know the tale by heart now, every turn."

"Then ring it out," said Heywood.

Gregory smiled
And cleared his throat.

"You must imagine, sirs,
The Clerk, sitting on high, among the clouds,
With London spread beneath him like a map.

Under his tower, a flock of prentices
Calling like bells, of little size or weight,
But bells no less, ask that the Bell of Bow
Shall tell the tale of Richard Whittington,
As thus."

Then Gregory Clopton, mellowing all
The chiming vowels, and dwelling on every tone
In rhythm or rhyme that helped to swell the peal
Or keep the ringing measure, beat for beat,
Chanted this legend of the London bells:—

Clerk of the Bow Bell, four and twenty prentices,
  All upon a Hallowe'en, we prithee, for our joy,
Ring a little turn again for sweet Dick Whittington,
  Flos Mercatorum, and a barefoot boy!—

"Children of Cheape," did that old Clerk answer,
  "You will have a peal, then, for well may you know,
All the bells of London remember Richard Whittington
  When they hear the voice of the big Bell of Bow!"—

Clerk with the yellow locks, mellow be thy malmsey!
  He was once a prentice, and carolled in the Strand!
Ay, and we are all, too, Marchaunt Adventurers,
  Prentices of London, and lords of Engeland.

"Children of Cheape," did that old Clerk answer,
  "Hold you, ah hold you, ah hold you all still!
Souling if you come to the glory of a Prentice,
  You shall have the Bow Bell rung at your will!"

"Whittington! Whittington! O, turn again, Whittington,
  Lord Mayor of London," the big Bell began:
"Where was he born? O, at Pauntley in Gloucestershire
  Hard by Cold Ashton, Cold Ashton," it ran.

"*Flos Mercatorum*," moaned the bell of All Hallowes,
  "There was he an orphan, O, a little lad alone!"
"Then we all sang," echoed happy St. Saviour's,
  "Called him, and lured him, and made him our own.

Told him a tale as he lay upon the hillside,
  Looking on his home in the meadow-lands below!"
"Told him a tale," clanged the bell of Cold Abbey;
  "Told him the truth," boomed the big Bell of Bow!

Sang of a City that was like a blazoned missal-book,
  Black with oaken gables, carven and inscrolled;
Every street a coloured page, and every sign a hieroglyph,
  Dusky with enchantments, a City paved with gold;

"Younger son, younger son, up with stick and bundle!"—
  Even so we rung for him—"But—kneel before you go;
Watch by your shield, lad, in little Paumley Chancel,
  Look upon the painted panes that hold your Arms a-glow.—

Coat of Gules and Azure; but the proud will not remember it!
  And the Crest a Lion's Head, until the new be won!
Far away, remember it! And O, remember this, too,—
  Every barefoot boy on earth is but a younger son."

Proudly he answered us, beneath the painted window,—
  "Though I be a younger son, the glory falls to me:
While my brother bideth by a little land in Gloucestershire,
  All the open Earth is mine, and all the Ocean-sea.

Yet will I remember, yet will I remember,
  By the chivalry of God, until my day be done,
When I meet a gentle heart, lonely and unshielded,
  Every barefoot boy on earth is but a younger son!"

Then he looked to Northward for the tall ships of Bristol;
  Far away, and cold as death, he saw the Severn shine:
Then he looked to Eastward, and he saw a string of colours
  Trickling through the grey hills, like elfin drops of wine;

Down along the Mendip dale, the chapmen and their horses,
  Far away, and carrying each its little coloured load,
Winding like a fairy-tale, with pack and corded bundle,
  Trickled like a crimson thread along the silver road.

Quick he ran to meet them, stick and bundle on his shoulder!
Over by Cold Ashton, he met them trampling down,—
White shaggy horses with their packs of purple spicery,
Crimson kegs of malmsey, and the silks of London town.

When the chapmen asked of him the bridle-path to Dorset,
Blithely he showed them, and he led them on their way,
Led them through the fern with their bales of breathing Araby,
Led them to a bridle-path that saved them half a day.

Merrily shook the silver bells that hung the broidered bridle-rein,
Chiming to his hand, as he led them through the fern,
Down to deep Dorset, and the wooded Isle of Purbeck,
Then—by little Kimmeridge—they led him turn for turn.

Down by little Kimmeridge, and up by Hampshire forest-roads,
Round by Sussex violets, and apple-bloom of Kent,
Singing songs of London, telling tales of London,
All the way to London, with packs of wool they went.

"London was London, then! A clean, clear moat
Girdled her walls that measured, round about,
Three miles or less. She is big and dirty now,"
Said Dekker.
"Call it a silver moat," growled Ben,
"That's the new poetry! Call it crystal, lad!
But, till you kiss the Beast, you'll never find
Your Fairy Prince. Why, all those crowded streets,
Flung all their filth, their refuse, rags and bones,
Dead cats and dogs, into your clean clear moat,
And made it sluggish as old Acheron.
Fevers and plagues, death in a thousand shapes
Crawled out of it. London was dirty, lad;
And till you kiss that fact, you'll never see
The glory of this old Jerusalem!"
"Ay, 'tis the fogs that make the sunset red,"
Answered Tom Heywood. "London is earthy, coarse,
Grimy and grand. You must make dirt the ground,

Or lose the colours of friend Clopton's tale.
Ring on!" And, nothing loth, the Clerk resumed:—

Bravely swelled his heart to see the moat of London glittering
  Round her mighty wall—they told him—two miles long!
Then—he gasped as, echoing in by grim black Aldgate,
  Suddenly their shaggy nags were nodding through a throng:

Prentices in red and ray, marchaunts in their saffron,
  Aldermen in violets, and minstrels in white,
Clerks in homely hoods of budge, and wives with crimson wimples,
Thronging as to welcome him that happy summer night.

"Back," they cried, and "Clear the way," and caught the ringing bridle-reins:
  "Wait! the Watch is going by, this vigil of St. John!"
Merrily laughed the chapmen then, reining their great white horses back,
  "When the pageant passes, lad, we'll up and follow on!"

There, as thick the crowd surged, beneath the blossomed ale-poles,
  Lifting up to Whittington a fair face afraid,
Swept against his horse by a billow of madcap prentices,
  Hard against the stirrup breathed a green-gowned maid.

Swift he drew her up and up, and throned her there before him,
  High above the throng with her laughing April eyes,
Like a Queen of Faërie on the great pack-saddle.
  "Hey!" laughed the chapmen, "the prentice wins the prize!"

"Whittington! Whittington! the world is all before you!"
  Blithely rang the bells and the steeples rocked and reeled!
Then—he saw her eyes grow wide, and, all along by Leaden Hall,
  Drums rolled, earth shook, and shattering trumpets pealed.

Like a marching sunset, there, from Leaden Hall to Aldgate,
Flared the crimson cressets—O, her brows were haloed then!—
Then the stirring steeds went by with all their mounted trumpeters,
Then, in ringing harness, a thousand marching men.

Marching—marching—his heart and all the halberdiers,
And his pulses throbbing with the throbbing of the drums;
Marching—marching—his blood and all the burganets!
"Look," she cried, "O, look," she cried, "and now the morrice comes!"

Dancing—dancing—her eyes and all the Lincoln Green,
Robin Hood and Friar Tuck, dancing through the town!
"Where is Marian?" Laughingly she turned to Richard Whittington.
"Here," he said, and pointed to her own green gown.

Dancing—dancing—her heart and all the morrice-bells!
Then there burst a mighty shout from thrice a thousand throats!
Then, with all their bows bent, and sheaves of peacock arrows,
Marched the tall archers in their white silk coats,

White silk coats, with the crest of London City
Crimson on the shoulder, a sign for all to read,—
Marching—marching—and then the sworded henchmen,
Then, William Walworth, on his great stirring steed.

Flos Mercatorum, ay, the fish-monger, Walworth,—
He whose nets of silk drew the silver from the tide,
He who saved the king when the king was but a prentice,—
Lord Mayor of London, with his sword at his side!

Burned with magic changes, his blood and all the pageantry;
Burned with deep sea-changes, the wonder in her eyes;
Flos Mercatorum! 'Twas the rose-mary of Paphos,
Reddening all the City for the prentice and his prize!

All the book of London, the pages of adventure,
Passed before the prentice on that vigil of St. John:
Then the chapmen shook their reins,—"We'll ride behind the revelry,
Round again to Cornhill! Up, and follow on!"

Riding on his pack-horse, above the shouting multitude,
There she turned and smiled at him, and thanked him for his grace:
"Let me down by *Red Rose Lane*," and, like a wave of twilight
While she spoke, her shadowy hair—touched his tingling face.

When they came to *Red Rose Lane*, beneath the blossomed ale-poles,
Light along his arm she lay, a moment, leaping down:
Then she waved "farewell" to him, and down the Lane he watched her
Flitting through the darkness in her gay green gown.

All along the Cheape, as he rode among the chapmen,
Round by *Black Friars*, to the *Two-Necked Swan*
Coloured like the sunset, prentices and maidens
Danced for red roses on the vigil of St. John.

Over them were jewelled lamps in great black galleries,
Garlanded with beauty, and burning all the night;
All the doors were shadowy with orpin and St. John's wort,
Long fennel, green birch, and lilies of delight.

"He should have slept here at the Mermaid Inn,"
Said Heywood as the chanter paused for breath.
"What? Has our Mermaid sung so long?" cried Ben.
"Her beams are black enough. There was an Inn,"
Said Tom, "that bore the name; and through its heart
There flowed the right old purple. I like to think
It was the same, where Lydgate took his ease
After his hood was stolen; and Gower, perchance;
And, though he loved the *Tabard* for a-while,
I like to think the Father of us all,

The old Adam of English minstrelsy caroused
Here in the Mermaid Tavern. I like to think
Jolly Dan Chaucer, with his kind shrewd face
Fresh as an apple above his fur-fringed gown,
One plump hand sporting with his golden chain,
Looked out from that old casement over the sign,
And saw the pageant, and the shaggy nags,
With Whittington, and his green-gowned maid, go by.
"O, very like," said Clopton, "for the bells
Left not a head indoors that night." He drank
A draught of malmsey—and thus renewed his tale:—

"*Flos Mercatorum*," mourned the bell of All Hallowes,
"There was he an orphan, O, a little lad alone,
Rubbing down the great white horses for a supper!"
"True," boomed the Bow Bell, "his hands were his own!"

Where did he sleep? On a plump white wool-pack,
Open to the moon on that vigil of St. John,
Sheltered from the dew, where the black-timbered gallery
Frowned above the yard of the *Two-Necked Swan*.

Early in the morning, clanged the bell of St. Martin's,
Early in the morning, with a groat in his hand,
Mournfully he parted with the jolly-hearted chapmen,
Shouldered his bundle and walked into the *Strand;*

Walked into the *Strand*, and back again to *West Cheape*,
Staring at the wizardry of every painted sign,
Dazed with the steeples and the rich heraldic cornices
Drinking in the colours of the Cheape like wine.

All about the booths now, the parti-coloured prentices
Fluted like a flock of birds along a summer lane,
Green linnets, red caps, and gay gold finches,—
What d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack again?

"Buy my dainty doublets, cut on double taffetas,
Buy my Paris thread," they cried, and caught him by the hand,
"Laces for your Heart's-Delight, and lawns to make her love you,
Cambric for her wimple, O, the finest in the land."

Ah, but he was hungry, foot-sore, weary,
Knocking at the doors of the armourers that day!
What d'ye lack? they asked of him; but no man lacked a prentice:
When he told them what he lacked, they frowned and turned away.

Hard was his bed that night, beneath a cruel archway,
Down among the hulks, with his heart growing cold!
London is a rare town, but O, the streets of London,
Red though their flints be, they are not red with gold.

Pale in the dawn, ere he marched on his adventure,
Starving for a crust, did he kneel a-while again,
Then, upon the fourth night, he cried, O, like a wounded bird
"Let me die, if die I must, in *Red Rose Lane*."

Like a little wounded bird he trailed through the darkness,
Laid him on a door-step, and then—O, like a breath
Pitifully blowing out his life's little rushlight,
Came a gush of blackness, a swoon deep as death.

Then he heard a rough voice! Then he saw a lanthorn!
Then he saw a bearded face, and blindly wondered whose:
Then—a marchaunt's portly legs, with great Rose-Windows,
Bigger than St. Paul's, he thought, embroidered on his shoes.

"Alice!" roared the voice, and then, O like a lilied angel,
Leaning from the lighted door a fair face afraid,
Leaning over *Red Rose Lane*, O, leaning out of Paradise,
Drooped the sudden glory of his green-gowned maid!

. . . . . .

"O, mellow be thy malmsey," grunted Ben,
Filling the Clerk another cup.

"The peal,"
Quoth Clopton, "is not ended, but the pause
In ringing, chimes to a deep inward ear
And tells its own deep tale. Silence and sound,
Darkness and light, mourning and mirth,—no tale,
No painting, and no music, nay, no world,
If God should cut their fruitful marriage-knot.
A shallow sort to-day would fain deny
A hell, sirs, to this boundless universe.
To such I say 'no hell, no Paradise!'
Others would fain deny the topless towers
Of heaven, and make this earth a hell indeed.
To such I say, 'the unplumbed gulfs of grief
Are only theirs for whom the blissful chimes
Ring from those unseen heights.' This earth, mid-way,
Hangs like a belfry where the ringers grasp
Their ropes in darkness, each in his own place,
Each knowing, by the tune in his own heart,
Never by sight, when he must toss through heaven
The tone of his own bell. Those bounded souls
Have never heard our chimes! Why, sirs, myself
Simply by running up and down the scale
Descend to hell or soar to heaven. My bells
Height above height, deep below deep, respond!
Their scale is infinite. Dare I, for one breath,
Dream that one note hath crowned and ended all,
Sudden I hear, far, far above those clouds,
Like laughing angels, peal on golden peal,
Innumerable as drops of April rain,
Yet every note distinct, round as a pearl,
And perfect in its place, a chime of law,
Whose pure and boundless mere arithmetic
Climbs with my soul to God."
Ben looked at him,
Gently. "Resume, old moralist," he said.
"On to thy marriage-bells!"
"The fairy-tales
Are wiser than they know, sirs. All our woes
Lead on to those celestial marriage-bells.
The world's a-wooing; and the pure City of God
Peals for the wedding of our joy and pain!

This was well seen of Richard Whittington;
For only he that finds the London streets
Paved with red flints, at last shall find them paved
Like to the Perfect City, with pure gold.
Ye know the world! what was a London waif
To Hugh Fitzwarren's daughter? He was fed
And harboured; and the cook declared she lacked
A scullion. So, in Hugh Fitzwarren's house,
He turned the jack, and scoured the dripping-pan.
How could he hope for more?
This marchaunt's house
Was builded like a great high-gabled inn,
Square, with a galleried courtyard, such as now
The players use. Its rooms were rich and dim
With deep-set coloured panes and massy beams.
Its ancient eaves jutted o'er *Red Rose Lane*
Darkly, like eyebrows of a mage asleep.
Its oaken stair coiled upward through a dusk
Heavy with fume of scented woods that burned
To keep the Plague away,—a gloom to embalm
A Pharaoh, but to dull the cheek and eye
Of country lads like Whittington.
He pined
For wind and sunlight. Yet he plied his task
Patient as in old tales of Elfin-land,
The young knight would unhelm his golden locks
And play the scullion, so that he might watch
His lady's eyes unknown, and oftener hear
Her brook-like laughter rippling overhead;
Her green gown, like the breath of Eden boughs,
Rustling nigh him. And all day long he found
Sunshine enough in this. But when at night
He crept into the low dark vaulted den,
The cobwebbed cellar, where the cook had strewn
The scullion's bed of straw (and none too thick
Lest he should sleep too long), he choked for breath;
And, like an old man hoarding up his life,
Fostered his glimmering rushlight as he sate
Bolt upright, while a horrible scurry heaved
His rustling bed, and bright black-beaded eyes
Peered at him from the crannies of the wall.

Then darkness whelmed him, and perchance he slept,—
Only to fight with nightmares and to fly
Down endless tunnels in a ghastly dream,
Hunted by horrible human souls that took
The shape of monstrous rats, great chattering snouts,
Vile shapes of shadowy cunning and grey greed,
That gnaw through beams, and undermine tall towns,
And carry the seeds of plague and ruin and death
Under the careless homes of sleeping men.
Thus, in the darkness, did he wage a war
With all the powers of darkness. 'If the light
Do break upon me, by the grace of God,'
So did he vow, 'O, then will I remember,
Then, then, will I remember, ay, and help
To build that lovelier City which is paved
For rich and poor alike, with purest gold.'

Ah, sirs, he kept his vow. Ye will not smile
If, at the first, the best that he could do
Was with his first poor penny-piece to buy
A cat, and bring her home, under his coat
By stealth (or else that termagant, the cook,
Had drowned it in the water-butt, nor deemed
The water worse to drink). So did he quell
First his own plague, but bettered others, too.
Now, in those days, Marchaunt Adventurers
Shared with their prentices the happy chance
Of each new venture. Each might have his stake,
Little or great, upon the glowing tides
Of high romance that washed the wharfs of Thames;
And every lad in London had his groat
Or splendid shilling on some fair ship at sea.

So, on an April eve, Fitzwarren called
His prentices together; for, ere long,
The *Unicorn*, his tall new ship, must sail
Beyond the world to gather gorgeous webs
From Eastern looms, great miracles of silk
Dipt in the dawn by wizard hands of Ind;
Or, if they chanced upon that fabled coast
Where Sydon, river of jewels, like a snake

Slides down the gorge its coils of crimson fire,
Perchance a richer cargo,—rubies, pearls,
Or gold bars from the Gates of Paradise.
And many a moon, at least, a faërie foam
Would lap Blackfriars wharf, where London lads
Gazed in the sunset down that misty reach
For old black battered hulks and tattered sails
Bringing their dreams home from the uncharted sea.

And one flung down a groat—he had no more.
One staked a shilling, one a good French crown;
And one an angel, O, light-winged enough
To reach Cathay; and not a lad but bought
His pennyworth of wonder,
So they thought,
Till all at once Fitzwarren's daughter cried
'Father, you have forgot poor Whittington!'
"'Snails,' laughed the rosy marchaunt, 'but that's true!
Fetch Whittington! The lad must stake his groat!
'Twill bring us luck!'
'Whittington! Whittington!'
Down the dark stair, like a gold-headed bird,
Fluttered sweet Alice. 'Whittington! Richard! Quick!
Quick with your groat now for the *Unicorn!*'

'A groat!' cried Whittington, standing there aghast,
With brown bare arms, still coloured by the sun,
Among his pots and pans. 'Where should I find
A groat? I staked my last groat in a cat!'
—'What! Have you nothing? Nothing but a cat?
Then stake the cat,' she said; and the quick fire
That in a woman's mind out-runs the thought
Of man, lit her grey eyes.
Whittington laughed
And opened the cellar-door. Out sailed his wealth,
Waving its tail, purring, and rubbing its head
Now on his boots, now on the dainty shoe
Of Alice, who straightway, deaf to his laughing prayers,
Caught up the cat, whispered it, hugged it close,
Against its grey fur leaned her glowing cheek,
And carried it off in triumph.

Red Rose Lane
Echoed with laughter as, with amber eyes
Blinking, the grey cat in a seaman's arms
Went to the wharf. 'Ay, but we need a cat,'
The captain said. So, when the painted ship
Sailed through a golden sunrise down the Thames,
A grey tail waved upon the misty poop,
And Whittington had his venture on the seas.

It was a nine days' jest, and soon forgot.
But, all that year,—ah, sirs, ye know the world,
For all the foolish boasting of the proud,
Looks not beneath the coat of Taunton serge
For Gules and Azure. A prince that comes in rags
To clean your shoes and, out of his own pride,
Waits for the world to paint his shield again
Must wait for ever and a day.
The world
Is a great hypocrite, hypocrite most of all
When thus it boasts its purple pride of race,
Then with eyes blind to all but pride of place
Tramples the scullion's heraldry underfoot,
Nay, never sees it, never dreams of it,
Content to know that, here and now, his coat
Is greasy . . .
So did Whittington find at last
Such nearness was most distant; that to see her,
Talk with her, serve her thus, was but to lose
True sight, true hearing. He must save his life
By losing it; forsake, to win, his love;
Go out into the world to bring her home.
It was but labour lost to clean the shoes,
And turn the jack, and scour the dripping-pan.
For every scolding blown about her ears
The cook's great ladle fell upon the head
Of Whittington; who, beneath her rule, became
The scullery's general scapegoat. It was he
That burned the pie-crust, drank the hippocras,
Dinted the silver beaker. . . .
Many a month
He chafed, till his resolve took sudden shape

And, out of the dark house at the peep of day,
Shouldering bundle and stick again, he stole
To seek his freedom, and to shake the dust
Of London from his shoes. . . .
You know the stone
On Highgate, where he sate awhile to rest,
With aching heart, and thought 'I shall not see
Her face again.' There, as the coloured dawn
Over the sleeping City slowly bloomed,
A small black battered ship with tattered sails
Blurring the burnished glamour of the Thames
Crept, side-long to a wharf.
Then, all at once,
The London bells rang out a welcome home;
And, over them all, tossing the tenor on high,
The Bell of Bow, a sun among the stars,
Flooded the morning air with this refrain:—

'Turn again, Whittington! Turn again, Whittington!
Flos Mercatorum, thy ship hath come home!
Trailing from her cross-trees the crimson of the sunrise,
Dragging all the glory of the sunset thro' the foam.
Turn again, Whittington,
Turn again, Whittington,
Lord Mayor of London!

Turn again, Whittington! When thy hope was darkest,
Far beyond the sky-line a ship sailed for thee.
Flos Mercatorum, O, when thy faith was blindest,
Even then thy sails were set beyond the Ocean-sea.'

So he heard and heeded us, and turned again to London,
Stick and bundle on his back, he turned to *Red Rose Lane*,
Hardly hearing as he went the chatter of the prentices,—
What d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack, and what d'ye lack again?

Back into the scullery, before the cook had missed him,
Early in the morning his labours he began:
Once again to clean the shoes and clatter with the water-pail,
Once again to scrub the jack and scour the dripping-pan.

All the bells of London were pealing as he laboured.
Wildly beat his heart, and his blood began to race.
Then—there came a light step and, suddenly, beside him
Stood his lady Alice, with a light upon her face.

'Quick,' she said, 'O, quick,' she said, 'they want you, Richard Whittington!'
'Quick,' she said; and, while she spoke, her lighted eyes betrayed
All that she had hidden long, and all she still would hide from him.
So—he turned and followed her, his green-gowned maid.

. . . . . .

There, in a broad dark oaken-panelled room
Rich with black carvings and great gleaming cups
Of silver, sirs, and massy halpace built
Half over *Red Rose Lane*, Fitzwarren sat;
And, at his side, O, like an old romance
That suddenly comes true and fills the world
With April colours, two bronzed seamen stood,
Tattered and scarred, and stained with sun and brine.
'*Flos Mercatorum*,' Hugh Fitzwarren cried,
Holding both hands out to the pale-faced boy,
'The prentice wins the prize! Why, Whittington,
Thy cat hath caught the biggest mouse of all!'
And, on to the table, tilting a heavy sack,
One of the seamen poured a glittering stream
Of rubies, emeralds, opals, amethysts,
That turned the room to an Aladdin's cave,
Or magic goblet brimmed with dusky wine
Where clustering rainbow-coloured bubbles clung
And sparkled, in the halls of Prester John.

'And that,' said Hugh Fitzwarren, 'is the price
Paid for your cat in Barbary, by a King
Whose house was rich in gems, but sorely plagued
With rats and mice. Gather it up, my lad,
And praise your master for his honesty;
For, though my cargo prospered, yours outshines
The best of it. Take it, my lad, and go;
You're a rich man; and, if you use it well,

Riches will make you richer, and the world
Will prosper in your own prosperity.
The miser, like the cold and barren moon,
Shines with a fruitless light. The spendthrift fool
Flits like a Jack-o-Lent over quags and fens;
But he that's wisely rich gathers his gold
Into a fruitful and unwasting sun
That spends its glory on a thousand fields
And blesses all the world. Take it and go.'

Blankly, as in a dream, Whittington stared.
'How should I take it, sir? The ship was yours,
And . . .'

'Ay, the ship was mine; but in that ship
Your stake was richer than we knew. 'Tis yours.'

'Then,' answered Whittington, 'if this wealth be mine,
Who but an hour ago was all so poor,
I know one way to make me richer still.'
He gathered up the glittering sack of gems,
Turned to the halpace, where his green-gowned maid
Stood in the glory of the coloured panes.
He thrust the splendid load into her arms,
Muttering—'Take it, lady! Let me be poor!
But rich, at least, in that you not despise
The waif you saved.'

—'Despise you, Whittington?'—
'O, no, not in the sight of God! But I
Grow tired of waiting for the Judgment Day!
I am but a man. I am a scullion now;
But I would like, only for half an hour,
To stand upright and say "I am a king!"
Take it!'

And, as they stood, a little apart,
Their eyes were married in one swift level look,
Silent, but all that souls could say was said.

. . . . . .

And
'I know a way,' said the Bell of St. Martin's.
'Tell it, and be quick,' laughed the prentices below!
'Whittington shall marry her, marry her, marry her!
Peal for a wedding,' said the big Bell of Bow.

He shall take a kingdom up, and cast it on the sea again;
  He shall have his caravels to traffic for him now;
He shall see his royal sails rolling up from Araby,
  And the crest—a honey-bee—golden at the prow.

Whittington! Whittington! The world is all a fairy tale!—
  Even so we sang for him.—But O, the tale is true!
Whittington he married her, and on his merry marriage-day,
  O, we sang, we sang for him, like lavrocks in the blue.

Far away from London, these happy prentice lovers
  Wandered through the fern to his western home again,
Down by deep Dorset to the wooded isle of Purbeck,
  Round to little Kimmeridge, by many a lover's lane.

There did they abide as in a dove-cote hidden
  Deep in happy woods until the bells of duty rang;
Then they rode the way he went, a barefoot boy to London,
  Round by Hampshire forest-roads, but as they rode he
    sang:—

Kimmeridge in Dorset is the happiest of places!
  All the little homesteads are thatched with beauty there!
All the old ploughmen, there, have happy smiling faces,
  Christmas roses in their cheeks, and crowns of silver hair.

Blue as are the eggs in the nest of the hedge-sparrow,
  Gleam the little rooms in the homestead that I know:
Death, I think, has lost the way to Kimmeridge in Dorset;
  Sorrow never knew it, or forgot it, long ago!

Kimmeridge in Dorset, Kimmeridge in Dorset,
  Though I may not see you more thro' all the years to be,
Yet will I remember the little happy homestead
  Hidden in that Paradise where God was good to me.

. . . . . .

So they turned to London, and with mind and soul he laboured,
  Flos Mercatorum, for the mighty years to be,
Fashioning, for profit—to the years that should forget him!—
  This, our sacred City that must shine upon the sea.

London was a City when the Poulters ruled the Poultry!
Rosaries of prayer were hung in Paternoster Row,
Gutter Lane was Guthrun's, then; and, bright with painted missal-books,
Ave Mary Corner, sirs, was fairer than ye know.

London was mighty when her marchaunts loved their merchandise,
Bales of Eastern magic that empurpled wharf and quay:
London was mighty when her booths were a dream-market.
Loaded with the colours of the sunset and the sea.

There, in all their glory, with the Virgin on their bannerols,
Glory out of Genoa, the Mercers might be seen,
Walking to their Company of Marchaunt Adventurers:—
Gallantly they jetted it in scarlet and in green.

There, in all the glory of the lordly Linen Armourers,
Walked the Marchaunt Taylors with the Pilgrim of their trade,
Fresh from adventuring in Italy and Flanders,
Flos Mercatorum, for a green-gowned maid.

Flos Mercatorum! Can a good thing come of Nazareth?
High above the darkness, where our duller senses drown,
Lifts the splendid Vision of a City, built on merchandise,
Fairer than that City of Light that wore the violet crown,

Lifts the sacred vision of a far-resplendent City,
Flashing, like the heart of heaven, its messages afar,
Trafficking, as God Himself through all His interchanging worlds,
Holding up the scales of law, weighing star by star,

Stern as Justice, in one hand the sword of Truth and Righteousness;
Blind as Justice, in one hand the everlasting scales,
Lifts the sacred Vision of that City from the darkness,
Whence the thoughts of men break out, like blossoms, or like sails!

Ordered and harmonious, a City built to music,
Lifting, out of chaos, the shining towers of law,—
Ay, a sacred City, and a City built of merchandise,
Flos Mercatorum, was the City that he saw.

And by that light," quoth Clopton, "did he keep
His promise. He was rich; but in his will
He wrote those words which should be blazed with gold
In London's *Liber Albus*:—

The desire
And busy intention of a man, devout
And wise, should be to fore-cast and secure
The state and end of this short life with deeds
Of mercy and pity, especially to provide
For those whom poverty insulteth, those
To whom the power of labouring for the needs
Of life, is interdicted.

He became
The Father of the City. Felons died
Of fever in old Newgate. He rebuilt
The prison. London sickened from the lack
Of water, and he made fresh fountains flow.
He heard the cry of suffering and disease,
And built the stately hospital that still
Shines like an angel's lanthorn through the night,
The stately halls of St. Bartholomew.
He saw men wrapt in ignorance, and he raised
Schools, colleges, and libraries. He heard
The cry of the old and weary, and he built
Houses of refuge.

Even so he kept
His prentice vows of Duty, Industry,
Obedience, words contemned of every fool
Who shrinks from law; yet were those ancient vows
The adamantine pillars of the State.
Let all who play their Samson be well warned
That Samsons perish, too!

His monument
Is London!"

"True," quoth Dekker, "and he deserves
Well of the Mermaid Inn for one good law,
Rightly enforced. He pilloried that rogue
Will Horold, who in Whittington's third year
Of office, as Lord Mayor, placed certain gums
And spices in great casks, and filled them up
With feeble Spanish wine, to have the taste
And smell of Romeney,—Malmsey!"
"Honest wine,
Indeed," replied the Clerk, "concerns the State,
That solemn structure touched with light from heaven,
Which he, our merchant, helped to build on earth.
And, while he laboured for it, all things else
Were added unto him, until the bells
More than fulfilled their prophecy.
One great eve,
Fair Alice, leaning from her casement, saw
Another Watch, and mightier than the first,
Billowing past the newly painted doors
Of Whittington Palace—so men called his house
In Hart Street, fifteen yards from old Mark Lane,—
A thousand burganets and halberdiers,
A thousand archers in their white silk coats,
A thousand mounted men in ringing mail,
A thousand sworded henchmen; then, his Guild,
Advancing, on their splendid bannerols
The Virgin, glorious in gold; and then,
Flos Mercatorum, on his great stirring steed
Whittington! On that night he made a feast
For London and the King. His feasting hall
Gleamed like the magic cave that Prester John
Wrought out of one huge opal. East and West
Lavished their wealth on that great Citizen
Who, when the King from Agincourt returned
Victorious, but with empty coffers, lent
Three times the ransom of an Emperor
To fill them—on the royal bond; and said
When the King questioned him of how and whence,
'I am the steward of your City, sire!
There is a sea, and who shall drain it dry?'

Over the roasted swans and peacock pies,
The minstrels in the great black gallery tuned
All hearts to mirth, until it seemed their cups
Were brimmed with dawn and sunset, and they drank
The wine of gods. Lord of a hundred ships,
Under the feet of England, Whittington flung
The purple of the seas. And when the Queen,
Catharine, wondered at the costly woods
That burned upon his hearth, the Marchaunt rose,
He drew the great sealed parchments from his breast,
The bonds the King had given him on his loans,
Loans that might drain the Mediterranean dry.
'They call us hucksters, madam, we that love
Our City,' and, into the red-hot heart of the fire,
He tossed the bonds of sixty thousand pounds.
'The fire burns low,' said Richard Whittington.
Then, overhead, the minstrels plucked their strings;
And, over the clash of wine-cups, rose a song
That made the old timbers of their feasting-hall
Shake, as a galleon shakes in a gale of wind,
When she rolls glorying through the Ocean-sea:—

Marchaunt Adventurers, O, what shall it profit you
Thus to seek your kingdom in the dream-destroying sun?
Ask us why the hawthorn brightens on the sky-line:
Even so our sails break out when Spring is well begun!
Flos Mercatorum! Blossom wide, ye sail of Englande,
Hasten ye the kingdom, now the bitter days are done!
Ay, for we be members, one of another,
'Each for all and all for each,' quoth Richard Whittington!

Chorus:— Marchaunt Adventurers,
Marchaunt Adventurers,
Marchaunt Adventurers, the Spring is well begun!
Break, break out on every sea, O, fair white sails of Englande!
'Each for all, and all for each,' quoth Richard Whittington.

Marchaunt Adventurers, O what 'ull ye bring home again?
Woonders and works and the thunder of the sea!
Whom will ye traffic with? The King of the sunset!—
What shall be your pilot, then?—A wind from Galilee!

—Nay, but ye be marchaunts, will ye come back empty-handed?—
Ay, we be marchaunts, though our gain we ne'er shall see!
Cast we now our bread upon the waste wild waters;
After many days it shall return with usury.

Chorus:— Marchaunt Adventurers,
Marchaunt Adventurers,
What shall be your profit in the mighty days to be?
Englande! Englande! Englande! Englande!
Glory everlasting and the lordship of the sea.

What need to tell you, sirs, how Whittington
Remembered? Night and morning, as he knelt
In those old days, O, like two children still,
Whittington and his Alice bowed their heads
Together, praying.
From such simple hearts,
O never doubt it, though the whole world doubt
The God that made it, came the steadfast strength
Of England, all that once was her strong soul,
The soul that laughed and shook away defeat
As her strong cliffs hurl back the streaming seas.
Sirs, in his old age Whittington returned,
And stood with Alice, by the silent tomb
In little Pauntley church.
There, to his Arms,
The Gules and Azure, and the Lion's Head
So proudly blazoned on the painted panes;
(O, sirs, the simple wistfulness of it
Might move hard hearts to laughter, but I think
Tears tremble through it, for the Mermaid Inn)
He added his new crest, the hard-won sign
And lowly prize of his own industry,
The Honey-bee. And, far away, the bells
Peal softly from the pure white City of God:—

Ut fragrans nardus
Fama fuit iste Ricardus.

With folded hands he waits the Judgment now.
Slowly our dark bells toll across the world,

For him who waits the reckoning, his accompt
Secure, his conscience clear, his ledger spread
A *Liber Albus* flooded with pure light.

Flos Mercatorum,
Fundator presbyterorum, . . .

Slowly the dark bells toll for him who asks
No more of men, but that they may sometimes
Pray for the souls of Richard Whittington,
Alice, his wife, and (as themselves of old
Had prayed) the father and mother of each of them.
Slowly the great notes fall and float away:—

Omnibus exemplum
Barathrum vincendo morosum
Condidit hoc templum . . .
Pauperibus pater . . . . .
Finiit ipse dies
Sis sibi Christe quies. Amen."

IX

RALEIGH

Ben was our only guest that day. His tribe
Had flown to their new shrine—the Apollo Room,
To which, though they enscrolled his golden verse
Above their doors like some great-fruited vine,
Ben still preferred our *Mermaid*, and to smoke
Alone in his old nook; perhaps to hear
The voices of the dead,
The voices of his old companions,
Hovering near him,—Will and Kit and Rob.

"Our Ocean-shepherd from the Main-deep sea,
Raleigh," he muttered, as I brimmed his cup,
"Last of the men that broke the fleets of Spain,
'Twas not enough to cage him, sixteen years,
Rotting his heart out in the Bloody Tower,

But they must fling him forth in his old age
To hunt for El Dorado. Then, mine host,
Because his poor old ship *The Destiny*
Smashes the Spaniard, but comes tottering home
Without the Spanish gold, our gracious king,
To please a catamite,
Sends the old lion back to the Tower again.
The friends of Spain will send him to the block
This time. That male Salome, Buckingham,
Is dancing for his head. Raleigh is doomed."
A shadow stood in the doorway. We looked up;
And there, but O, how changed, how worn and grey,
Sir Walter Raleigh, like a hunted thing,
Stared at us.
"Ben," he said, and glanced behind him.
Ben took a step towards him.
"O, my God,
Ben," whispered the old man in a husky voice,
Half timorous and half cunning, so unlike
His old heroic self that one might weep
To hear it, "Ben, I have given them all the slip!
I may be followed. Can you hide me here
Till it grows dark?"
Ben drew him quickly in, and motioned me
To lock the door. "Till it grows dark," he cried,
"My God, that you should ask it!"
"Do not think,
Do not believe that I am quite disgraced,"
The old man faltered, "for they'll say it, Ben;
And when my boy grows up, they'll tell him, too,
His father was a coward. I do cling
To life for many reasons, not from fear
Of death. No, Ben, I can disdain that still;
But—there's my boy!"
Then all his face went blind.
He dropt upon Ben's shoulder and sobbed outright,
"They are trying to break my pride, to break my pride!"
The window darkened, and I saw a face
Blurring the panes. Ben gripped the old man's arm,
And led him gently to a room within,
Out of the way of guests.

"Your pride," he said,
"That is the pride of England!"
At that name—
England!—
As at a signal-gun, heard in the night
Far out at sea, the weather and world-worn man,
That once was Raleigh, lifted up his head.
Old age and weakness, weariness and fear
Fell from him like a cloak. He stood erect.
His eager eyes, full of great sea-washed dawns,
Burned for a moment with immortal youth,
While tears blurred mine to see him.
"You do think
That England will remember? You do think it?"
He asked with a great light upon his face.
Ben bowed his head in silence.

. . . . . .

"I have wronged
My cause by this," said Raleigh. "Well they know it
Who left this way for me. I have flung myself
Like a blind moth into this deadly light
Of freedom. Now, at the eleventh hour,
Is it too late? I might return and—"
"No!
Not now!" Ben interrupted. "I'd have said
Laugh at the headsman sixteen years ago,
When England was awake. She will awake
Again. But now, while our most gracious king,
Who hates tobacco, dedicates his prayers
To Buckingham—
This is no land for men that, under God,
Shattered the Fleet Invincible."
A knock
Startled us, at the outer door. "My friend
Stukeley," said Raleigh, "if I know his hand.
He has a ketch will carry me to France,
Waiting at Tilbury."
I let him in,—
A lean and stealthy fellow, Sir Lewis Stukeley,—
I liked him little. He thought much of his health,

More of his money bags, and most of all
On how to run with all men all at once
For his own profit. At the *Mermaid Inn*
Men disagreed in friendship and in truth;
But he agreed with all men, and his life
Was one soft quag of falsehood. Fugitives
Must use false keys, I thought; and there was hope
For Raleigh if such a man would walk one mile
To serve him now. Yet my throat moved to see him
Usurping, with one hand on Raleigh's arm,
A kind of ownership. "*Lend me ten pounds,*"
Were the first words he breathed in the old man's ear,
And Raleigh slipped his purse into his hand.

. . . . . .

Just over Bread Street hung the bruised white moon
When they crept out. Sir Lewis Stukeley's watch-dog,
A derelict bo'sun, with a mulberry face,
Met them outside. "The coast quite clear, eh, Hart?"
Said Stukeley. "Ah, that's good. Lead on, then, quick."
And there, framed in the cruddle of moonlit clouds
That ended the steep street, dark on its light,
And standing on those glistening cobblestones
Just where they turned to silver, Raleigh looked back
Before he turned the corner. He stood there.
A figure like foot-feathered Mercury,
Tall, straight and splendid, waving his plumed hat
To Ben, and taking his last look, I felt,
Upon our *Mermaid Tavern*. As he paused,
His long fantastic shadow swayed and swept
Against our feet. Then, like a shadow, he passed.

"It is not right," said Ben, "it is not right.
Why did they give the old man so much grace?
Witness and evidence are what they lack.
Would you trust Stukeley—not to draw him out?
Raleigh was always rash. A phrase or two
Will turn their murderous axe into a sword
Of righteousness—

Why, come to think of it,
Blackfriar's Wharf, last night, I landed there,
And—no, by God!—Raleigh is not himself,
The tide will never serve beyond Gravesend.
It is a trap! Come on! We'll follow them!
Quick! To the river side!"—
We reached the wharf
Only to see their wherry, a small black cloud
Dwindling far down that running silver road.
Ben touched my arm.
"Look there," he said, pointing up-stream.
The moon
Glanced on a cluster of pikes, like silver thorns,
Three hundred yards away, a little troop
Of weaponed men, embarking hurriedly.
Their great black wherry clumsily swung about,
Then, with twelve oars for legs, came striding down,
An armoured beetle on the glittering trail
Of some small victim.
Just below our wharf
A little dinghy waddled.
Ben cut the painter, and without one word
Drew her up crackling thro' the lapping water,
Motioned me to the tiller, thrust her off,
And, pulling with one oar, backing with the other,
Swirled her round and down, hard on the track
Of Raleigh. Ben was an old man now but tough,
O tough as a buccaneer. We distanced them.
His oar blades drove the silver boiling back.
By Broken Wharf the beetle was a speck.
It dwindled by Queen Hythe and the Three Cranes.
By Bellyn's Gate we had left it, out of sight.
By Custom House and Galley Keye we shot
Thro' silver all the way, without one glimpse
Of Raleigh. Then a dreadful shadow fell
And over us the Tower of London rose
Like ebony; and, on the glittering reach
Beyond it, I could see the small black cloud
That carried the great old seaman slowly down
Between the dark shores whence in happier years
The throng had cheered his golden galleons out,

And watched his proud sails filling for Cathay.
There, as through lead, we dragged by Traitor's Gate,
There, in the darkness, under the Bloody Tower,
There, on the very verge of victory,
Ben gasped and dropped his oars.
"Take one and row," he said, "my arms are numbed.
We'll overtake him yet!" I clambered past him,
And took the bow oar.

Once, as the pace flagged,
Over his shoulder he turned his great scarred face
And snarled, with a trickle of blood on his coarse lips,
"Hard!"—
And blood and fire ran through my veins again,
For half a minute more.

Yet we fell back.
Our course was crookèd now. And suddenly
A grim black speck began to grow behind us,
Grow like the threat of death upon old age.
Then, thickening, blackening, sharpening, foaming, swept
Up the bright line of bubbles in our wake,
That armoured wherry, with its long twelve oars
All well together now.

"Too late," gasped Ben,
His ash-grey face uplifted to the moon,
One quivering hand upon the thwart behind him,
A moment. Then he bowed over his knees
Coughing. "But we'll delay them. We'll be drunk,
And hold the catch-polls up!"

We drifted down
Before them, broadside on. They sheered aside.
Then, feigning a clumsy stroke, Ben drove our craft
As they drew level, right in among their blades.
There was a shout, an oath. They thrust us off;
And then we swung our nose against their bows
And pulled them round with every well-meant stroke.
A full half minute, ere they won quite free,
Cursing us for a pair of drunken fools.

We drifted down behind them.

"There's no doubt,"
Said Ben, "the headsman waits behind all this

For Raleigh. This is a play to cheat the soul
Of England, teach the people to applaud
The red fifth act."
Without another word we drifted down
For centuries it seemed, until we came
To Greenwich.
Then up the long white burnished reach there crept
Like little sooty clouds the two black boats
To meet us.
"He is in the trap," said Ben,
"And does not know it yet. See, where he sits
By Stukeley as by a friend."
Long after this,
We heard how Raleigh, simply as a child,
Seeing the tide would never serve him now,
And they must turn, had taken from his neck
Some trinkets that he wore. "Keep them," he said
To Stukeley, "in remembrance of this night."

He had no doubts of Stukeley when he saw
The wherry close beside them. He but wrapped
His cloak a little closer round his face.
Our boat rocked in their wash when Stukeley dropped
The mask. We saw him give the sign, and heard
His high-pitched quavering voice—"IN THE KING'S NAME!"
Raleigh rose to his feet. "I am under arrest?"
He said, like a dazed man.
And Stukeley laughed.
Then, as he bore himself to the grim end,
All doubt being over, the old sea-king stood
Among those glittering points, a king indeed.
The black boats rocked. We heard his level voice,
"*Sir Lewis, these actions never will turn out*
To your good credit." Across the moonlit Thames
It rang contemptuously, cold as cold steel,
And passionless as the judgment that ends all.

. . . . . .

Some three months later, Raleigh's widow came
To lodge a se'nnight at the Mermaid Inn.
His house in Bread Street was no more her own,

But in the hands of Stukeley, who had reaped
A pretty harvest. . .
She kept close to her room, and that same night,
Being ill and with some fever, sent her maid
To fetch the apothecary from Friday Street,
Old "Galen" as the Mermaid christened him.
At that same moment, as the maid went out,
Stukeley came in. He met her at the door;
And, chucking her under the chin, gave her a letter.
"Take this up to your mistress. It concerns
Her property," he said. "Say that I wait,
And would be glad to speak with her."
The wench
Looked pertly in his face, and tripped upstairs.
I scarce could trust my hands.
"Sir Lewis," I said,
"This is no time to trouble her. She is ill."
"Let her decide," he answered, with a sneer.
Before I found another word to say
The maid tripped down again. I scarce believed
My senses, when she beckoned him up the stair.
Shaking from head to foot, I blocked the way.
"Property!" Could the crux of mine and thine
Bring widow and murderer into one small room?
"Sir Lewis," I said, "she is ill. It is not right!
She never would consent."
He sneered again,
"You are her doctor? Out of the way, old fool!
She has decided!"
"Go," I said to the maid,
"Fetch the apothecary. Let it rest
With him!"
She tossed her head. Her quick eyes glanced,
Showing the white, like the eyes of a vicious mare.
She laughed at Stukeley, loitered, then obeyed.

And so we waited, till the wench returned,
With Galen at her heels. His wholesome face,
Russet and wrinkled like an apple, peered
Shrewdly at Stukeley, twinkled once at me,

And passed in silence, leaving a whiff of herbs
Behind him on the stair.
Five minutes later,
To my amazement, that same wholesome face
Leaned from the lighted door above, and called
"Sir Lewis Stukeley!"
Sir Judas hastened up.
The apothecary followed him within.
The door shut. I was left there in the dark
Bewildered; for my heart was hot with thoughts
Of those last months. Our Summer's Nightingale,
Our Ocean-Shepherd from the Main-deep Sea,
The Founder of our Mermaid Fellowship,
Was this his guerdon—at the Mermaid Inn?
Was this that maid-of-honour whose romance
With Raleigh, once, had been a kingdom's talk?
Could Bess Throckmorton slight his memory thus?
"It is not right," I said, "it is not right.
She wrongs him deeply."
I leaned against the porch
Staring into the night. A ghostly ray
Above me, from her window, bridged the street,
And rested on the goldsmith's painted sign
Opposite.
I could hear the muffled voice
Of Stukeley overhead, persuasive, bland;
And then, her own, cooing, soft as a dove
Calling her mate from Eden cedar-boughs,
Flowed on and on; and then—all my flesh crept
At something worse than either, a long space
Of silence that stretched threatening and cold,
Cold as a dagger-point pricking the skin
Over my heart.
Then came a stifled cry,
A crashing door, a footstep on the stair
Blundering like a drunkard's, heavily down;
And with his gasping face one tragic mask
Of horror,—may God help me to forget
Some day the frozen awful eyes of one
Who, fearing neither hell nor heaven, has met
That ultimate weapon of the gods, the face

And serpent-tresses that turn flesh to stone—
Stukeley stumbled, groping his way out,
Blindly, past me, into the sheltering night.

. . . . . .

It was the last night of another year
Before I understood what punishment
Had overtaken Stukeley. Ben, and Brome—
Ben's ancient servant, but turned poet now—
Sat by the fire with the old apothecary
To see the New Year in.
The starry night
Had drawn me to the door. Could it be true
That our poor earth no longer was the hub
Of those white wheeling orbs? I scarce believed
The strange new dreams; but I had seen the veils
Rent from vast oceans and huge continents,
Till what was once our comfortable fire,
Our cosy tavern, and our earthly home
With heaven beyond the next turn in the road,
All the resplendent fabric of our world
Shrank to a glow-worm, lighting up one leaf
In one small forest, in one little land,
Among those wild infinitudes of God.
A tattered wastrel wandered down the street,
Clad in a seaman's jersey, staring hard
At every sign. Beneath our own, the light
Fell on his red carbuncled face. I knew him—
The bo'sun, Hart.
He pointed to our sign
And leered at me. "That's her," he said, "no doubt,
The sea-witch with the shiny mackerel tail
Swishing in wine. That's what Sir Lewis meant.
He called it blood. Blood is his craze, you see.
This is the Mermaid Tavern, sir, no doubt?"
I nodded. "Ah, I thought as much," he said.
"Well—happen this is worth a cup of ale."
He thrust his hand under his jersey and lugged
A greasy letter out. It was inscribed
THE APOTHECARY AT THE MERMAID TAVERN.

I led him in. "I knew it, sir," he said,
While Galen broke the seal. "Soon as I saw
That sweet young naked wench curling her tail
In those red waves.—The old man called it blood.
Blood is his craze, you see.—But you can tell
'Tis wine, sir, by the foam. Malmsey, no doubt.
And that sweet wench to make you smack your lips
Like oysters, with her slippery tail and all!
Why, sir, no doubt, this was the Mermaid Inn."

"But this," said Galen, lifting his grave face
To Ben, "this letter is from all that's left
Of Stukeley. The good host, there, thinks I wronged
Your Ocean-shepherd's memory. From this letter,
I think I helped to avenge him. Do not wrong
His widow, even in thought. She loved him dearly.
You know she keeps his poor grey severed head
Embalmed; and so will keep it till she dies;
Weeps over it alone. I have heard such things
In wild Italian tales. But *this* was true.
Had I refused to let her speak with Stukeley
I feared she would go mad. This letter proves
That I—and she perhaps—were instruments,
Of some more terrible chirurgery
Than either knew."

"Ah, when I saw your sign,"
The bo'sun interjected, "I'd no doubt
That letter was well worth a cup of ale."

"Go—paint your bows with hell-fire somewhere else,
Not at this inn," said Ben, tossing the rogue
A good French crown. "Pickle yourself in hell."
And Hart lurched out into the night again,
Muttering "Thank you, sirs. 'Twas worth all that.
No doubt at all."

"There are some men," said Galen,
Spreading the letter out on his plump knees,
"Will heap up wrong on wrong; and, at the last,
Wonder because the world will not forget
Just when it suits them, cancel all they owe,
And, like a mother, hold its arms out wide
At their first cry. And, sirs, I do believe

That Stukeley, on that night, had some such wish
To reconcile himself. What else had passed
Between the widow and himself I know not;
But she had lured him on until he thought
That words and smiles, perhaps a tear or two,
Might make the widow take the murderer's hand
In friendship, since it might advantage both.
Indeed, he came prepared for even more.
Villains are always fools. A wicked act,
What is it but a false move in the game,
A blind man's blunder, a deaf man's reply,
The wrong drug taken in the dead of night?
I always pity villains.
I mistook
The avenger for the victim. There she lay
Panting, that night, her eyes like summer stars
Her pale gold hair upon the pillows tossed
Dishevelled, while the fever in her face
Brought back the lost wild roses of her youth
For half an hour. Against a breast as pure
And smooth as any maid's, her soft arms pressed
A bundle wrapped in a white embroidered cloth.
She crooned over it as a mother croons
Over her suckling child. I stood beside her.
—That was her wish, and mine, while Stukeley stayed.—
And, over against me, on the other side,
Stood Stukeley, gnawing his nether lip to find
She could not, or she would not, speak one word
In answer to his letter.
'Lady Raleigh,
You wrong me, and you wrong yourself,' he cried,
'To play like a green girl when great affairs
Are laid before you. Let me speak with you
Alone.'
'But I am all alone,' she said,
'Far more alone than I have ever been
In all my life before. This is my doctor.
He must not leave me.'
Then she lured him on,
Played on his brain as a musician plays
Upon the lute.

'Forgive me, dear Sir Lewis,
If I am grown too gay for widowhood.
But I have pondered for a long, long time
On all these matters. I know the world was right;
And Spain was right, Sir Lewis. Yes, and you,
You too, were right; and my poor husband wrong.
You see I knew his mind so very well.
I knew his every gesture, every smile.
I lived with him. I think I died with him.
It is a strange thing, marriage. For my soul
(As if myself were present in this flesh)
Beside him, slept in his grey prison-cell
On that last dreadful dawn. I heard the throng
Murmuring round the scaffold far away;
And, with the smell of sawdust in my nostrils,
I woke, bewildered as himself, to see
That tall black-cassocked figure by his bed.
I heard the words that made him understand:
The Body of our Lord—take and eat this!
I rolled the small sour flakes beneath my tongue
With him. I caught, with him, the gleam of tears,
Far off, on some strange face of sickly dread.
The Blood—and the cold cup was in my hand,
Cold as an axe-heft washed with waterish red.
I heard his last poor cry to wife and child.—
Could any that heard forget it?—*My true God,*
Hold you both in His arms, both in His arms.
And then—that last poor wish, a thing to raise
A smile in some. I have smiled at it myself
A thousand times.
"*Give me my pipe,*" he said,
"*My old Winchester clay, with the long stem,*
And half an hour alone. The crowd can wait.
They have not waited half so long as I."
And then, O then, I know what soft blue clouds,
What wavering rings, fragrant ascending wreaths
Melted his prison walls to a summer haze,
Through which I think he saw the little port
Of Budleigh Salterton, like a sea-bird's nest
Among the Devon cliffs—the tarry quay
Whence in his boyhood he had flung a line

For bass or whiting-pollock. I remembered
(Had he not told me, on some summer night,
His arm about my neck, kissing my hair)
He used to sit there, gazing out to sea;
Fish, and for what? Not all for what he caught
And handled; but for rainbow-coloured things,
The water-drops that jewelled his thin line,
Flotsam and jetsam of the sunset-clouds;
While the green water, gurgling through the piles,
Heaving and sinking, helped him to believe
The fast-bound quay a galleon plunging out
Superbly for Cathay. There would he sit
Listening, a radiant boy, child of the sea,
Listening to some old seaman's glowing tales,
His grey eyes rich with pictures—
Then he saw,
And I with him, that gathering in the West,
To break the Fleet Invincible. O, I heard
The trumpets and the neighings and the drums.
I watched the beacons on a hundred hills.
I drank that wine of battle from *his* cup,
And gloried in it, lying against his heart.
I sailed with him and saw the unknown worlds!
The slender ivory towers of old Cathay
Rose for us over lilac-coloured seas
That crumbled a sky-blue foam on long shores
Of shining sand, shores of so clear a glass
They drew the sunset-clouds into their bosom
And hung that City of Vision in mid-air
Girdling it round, as with a moat of sky,
Hopelessly beautiful. O, yet I heard,
Heard from his blazoned poops the trumpeters
Blowing proud calls, while overhead the flag
Of England floated from white towers of sail—
And yet, and yet, I knew that he was wrong,
And soon he knew it, too.
I saw the cloud
Of doubt assail him, in the Bloody Tower,
When, being withheld from sailing the high seas
For sixteen years, he spread a prouder sail,
Took up his pen, and, walled about with stone,

Began to write—his *History of the World.*
And emperors came like Lazarus from the grave
To wear his purple. And the night disgorged
Its empires, till, O, like the swirl of dust
Around their marching legions, that dim cloud
Of doubt closed round him. Was there any man
So sure of heart and brain as to record
The simple truth of things himself had seen?
Then who could plumb that night? The work broke off!
He knew that he was wrong. I knew it, too!
Once more that stately structure of his dreams
Melted like mist. His eagles perished like clouds.
Death wound a thin horn through the centuries.
The grave resumed his forlorn emperors.
His empires crumbled back to a little ash
Knocked from his pipe.—
He dropped his pen in homage to the truth.
The truth? *O, eloquent, just and mighty Death!*

Then, when he forged, out of one golden thought,
A key to open his prison; when the King
Released him for a tale of faërie gold
Under the tropic palms; when those grey walls
Melted before his passion; do you think
The gold that lured the King was quite the same
As that which Raleigh saw? You know the song:

"Say to the King," quoth Raleigh,
"I have a tale to tell him;
Wealth beyond derision,
Veils to lift from the sky,
Seas to sail for England,
And a little dream to sell him,
Gold, the gold of a vision
That angels cannot buy."

Ah, no! For all the beauty and the pride,
Raleigh was wrong; but not so wrong, I think,
As those for whom his kingdoms oversea
Meant only glittering dust. The fight he waged
Was not with them. They never worsted him.

It was *The Destiny* that brought him home
Without the Spanish gold.— O, he was wrong,
But such a wrong, in Gloriana's day,
Was more than right, was immortality.
He had just half an hour to put all this
Into his pipe and smoke it.—
The red fire,
The red heroic fire that filled his veins
When the proud flag of England floated out
Its challenge to the world—all gone to ash?
What! Was the great red wine that Drake had quaffed
Vinegar? He must fawn, haul down his flag,
And count all nations nobler than his own,
Tear out the lions from the painted shields
That hung his poop, for fear that he offend
The pride of Spain? Treason to sack the ships
Of Spain? The wounds of slaughtered Englishmen
Cried out—*there is no law beyond the line!*
Treason to sweep the seas with Francis Drake?
Treason to fight for England?
If it were so,
The times had changed and quickly. He had been
A schoolboy in the morning of the world
Playing with wooden swords and winning crowns
Of tinsel; but his comrades had outgrown
Their morning-game, and gathered round to mock
His battles in the sunset. Yet he knew
That all his life had passed in that brief day;
And he was old, too old to understand
The smile upon the face of Buckingham,
The smile on Cobham's face, at that great word
England!
He knew the solid earth was changed
To something less than dust among the stars—
And, O, be sure he knew that he was wrong,
That gleams would come,
Gleams of a happier world for younger men,
That Commonwealth, far off. This was a time
Of sadder things, destruction of the old
Before the new was born. At least he knew
It was his own way that had brought the world

Thus far, England thus far! How could he change,
Who had loved England as a man might love
His mistress, change from year to fickle year?
For the new years would change, even as the old.
No—he was wedded to that old first love,
Crude flesh and blood, and coarse as meat and drink,
The woman—England; no fine angel-isle,
Ruled by that male Salome—Buckingham!
Better the axe than to live on and wage
These new and silent and more deadly wars
That play at friendship with our enemies.
Such times are evil. Not of their own desire
They lead to good, blind agents of that Hand
Which now had hewed him down, down to his knees,
But in a prouder battle than men knew.

His pipe was out, the guard was at the door.
Raleigh was not a god. But, when he climbed
The scaffold, I believe he looked a man.
And when the axe fell, I believe that God
Set on his shoulders that immortal head
Which he desired on earth.
O, he was wrong!
But when that axe fell, not one shout was raised.
That mighty throng around that crimson block
Stood silent—like the hushed black cloud that holds
The thunder. You might hear the headsman's breath.
Stillness like that is dangerous, being charged,
Sometimes, with thought, Sir Lewis! England sleeps!
What if, one day, the Stewart should be called
To know that England wakes? What if a shout
Should thunder-strike Whitehall, and the dogs lift
Their heads along the fringes of the crowd
To catch a certain savour that I know,
The smell of blood and sawdust?—
Ah, Sir Lewis,
'Tis hard to find one little seed of right
Among so many wrongs. Raleigh was wrong,
And yet—it was because he loved his country
Next to himself, Sir Lewis, by your leave,

His country butchered him. You did not know
That I was only third in his affections?
The night I told him—we were parting then—
I had begged the last disposal of his body,
Did he not say, with O, so gentle a smile,
"*Thou hadst not always the disposal of it*
In life, dear Bess. 'Tis well it should be thine
In death!"'

'The jest was bitter at such an hour,
And somewhat coarse in grain,' Stukeley replied.
'Indeed I thought him kinder.'

'Kinder,' she said,
Laughing bitterly.

Stukeley looked at her.
She whispered something, and his lewd old eyes
Fastened upon her own. He knelt by her.
'Perhaps,' he said, 'your woman's wit has found
A better way to solve this bitter business.'
Her head moved on the pillow with little tossings.
He touched her hand. It leapt quickly away.
She hugged that strange white bundle to her breast,
And writhed back, smiling at him, across the bed.

'Ah, Bess,' he whispered huskily, pressing his lips
To that warm hollow where her head had lain,
'There is one way to close the long dispute,
Keep the estates unbroken in your hands
And stop all slanderous tongues, one happy way.
We have some years to live; and why alone?'
'Alone?' she sighed. 'My husband thought of that.
He wrote a letter to me long ago,
When he was first condemned. He said—he said—
Now let me think—what was it that he said?—
I had it all by heart. "*Beseech you, Bess,*
Hide not yourself for many days", he said.'

'True wisdom that,' quoth Stukeley, 'for the love
That seeks to chain the living to the dead
Is but self-love at best!'

'And yet,' she said,
'How his poor heart was torn between two cares,
Love of himself and care for me, as thus:

Love God! Begin to repose yourself on Him!
Therein you shall find true and lasting riches;
But all the rest is nothing. When you have tired
Your thoughts on earthly things, when you have travelled
Through all the glittering pomps of this proud world
You shall sit down by Sorrow in the end.
Begin betimes, and teach your little son
To serve and fear God also.
Then God will be a husband unto you,
And unto him a father; nor can Death
Bereave you any more. When I am gone,
No doubt you shall be sought unto by many
For the world thinks that I was very rich.
No greater misery can befall you, Bess,
Than to become a prey, and, afterwards,
To be despised.'

'Human enough,' said Stukeley,
'And yet—self-love, self-love!'

'Ah no,' quoth she,
'You have not heard the end: *God knows, I speak it*
Not to dissuade you—not to dissuade you, mark—
From marriage. That will be the best for you,
Both in respect of God and of the world.
Was *that* self-love, Sir Lewis? Ah, not all.
And thus he ended: *For his father's sake*
That chose and loved you in his happiest times,
Remember your poor child! The Everlasting,
Infinite, powerful, and inscrutable God,
Keep you and yours, have mercy upon me,
And teach me to forgive my false accusers—
Wrong, even in death, you see. Then—*My true wife,*
Farewell!
Bless my poor boy! Pray for me! My true God,
Hold you both in His arms, both in His arms!
I know that he was wrong. You did not know,
Sir Lewis, that he had left me a little child.
Come closer. You shall see its orphaned face,
The sad, sad relict of a man that loved
His country—all that's left to me. Come, look!'
She beckoned Stukeley nearer. He bent down
Curiously. Her feverish fingers drew

The white wrap from the bundle in her arms,
And, with a smile that would make angels weep,
She showed him, pressed against her naked breast,
Terrible as Medusa, the grey flesh
And shrivelled face, embalmed, the thing that dropped
Into the headsman's basket, months agone,—
The head of Raleigh.
Half her body lay
Bare, while she held that grey babe to her heart;
But Judas hid his face. . . .
'Living,' she said, 'he was not always mine;
But—dead—I shall not wean him'—
Then, I too
Covered my face— I cannot tell you more.
There was a dreadful silence in that room,
Silence that, as I know, shattered the brain
Of Stukeley.— When I dared to raise my head
Beneath that silent thunder of our God,
The man had gone—
This is his letter, sirs,
Written from Lundy Island: *For God's love,*
Tell them it is a cruel thing to say
That I drink blood. I have no secret sin.
A thousand pound is not so great a sum;
And that is all they paid me, every penny.
Salt water, that is all the drink I taste
On this rough island. Somebody has taught
The sea-gulls how to wail around my hut
All night, like lost souls. And there is a face,
A dead man's face that laughs in every storm,
And sleeps in every pool along the coast.
I thought it was my own, once. But I know
These actions never, never, on God's earth,
Will turn out to their credit, who believe
That I drink blood."
He crumpled up the letter
And tossed it into the fire.
"Galen," said Ben,
"I think you are right—that one should pity villains."

. . . . . .

The clock struck twelve. The bells began to peal.
We drank a cup of sack to the New Year.
"New songs, new voices, all as fresh as may,"
Said Ben to Brome, "but I shall never live
To hear them."
All was not so well, indeed,
With Ben, as hitherto. Age had come upon him.
Hé dragged one foot as in paralysis.
The critics bayed against the old lion, now,
And called him arrogant. "My brain," he said,
"Is yet unhurt although, set round with pain,
It cannot long hold out." He never stooped,
Never once pandered to that brainless hour.
His coat was thread-bare. Weeks had passed of late
Without his voice resounding in our inn.

"The statues are defiled, the gods dethroned,
The Ionian movement reigns, not the free soul.
And, as for me, I have lived too long," he said.
"Well—I can weave the old threnodies anew."
And, filling his cup, he murmured, soft and low,
A new song, breaking on an ancient shore:

I

Marlowe is dead, and Greene is in his grave,
And sweet Will Shakespeare long ago is gone!
Our Ocean-shepherd sleeps beneath the wave;
Robin is dead, and Marlowe in his grave.
Why should I stay to chant an idle stave,
And in my Mermaid Tavern drink alone?
For Kit is dead and Greene is in his grave,
And sweet Will Shakespeare long ago is gone.

II

Where is the singer of the Faërie Queen?
Where are the lyric lips of Astrophel?
Long, long ago, their quiet graves were green;
Ay, and the grave, too, of their Faërie Queen!

And yet their faces, hovering here unseen,
  Call me to taste their new-found œnomel;
To sup with him who sang the Faëric Queen;
  To drink with him whose name was Astrophel.

III

I drink to that great Inn beyond the grave!
  —If there be none, the gods have done us wrong.—
Ere long I hope to chant a better stave,
In some great Mermaid Inn beyond the grave;
And quaff the best of earth that heaven can save,
  Red wine like blood, deep love of friends and song.
I drink to that great Inn beyond the grave;
  And hope to greet my golden lads ere long.

He raised his cup and drank in silence. Brome
Drank with him, too. The bells had ceased to peal.
Galen shook hands, and bade us all good-night.
Then Brome, a little wistfully, I thought,
Looked at his old-time master, and prepared
To follow.
"Good-night—Ben," he said, a pause
Before he spoke the name. "Good-night! Good-night!
My dear old Brome," said Ben.
And, at the door,
Brome whispered to me, "He is lonely now.
There are not many left of his old friends.
We all go out—like this—into the night.
But what a fleet of stars!" he said, and shook
My hand, and smiled, and pointed to the sky.
And, when I looked into the room again,
The lights were very dim, and I believed
That Ben had fallen asleep. His great grey head
Was bowed across the table, on his arms.
Then, all at once, I knew that he was weeping;
And like a shadow I crept back again,
And stole into the night.
There as I stood
Under the painted sign, I could have vowed
That I, too, heard the voices of the dead,

The voices of his old companions,
Gathering round him in that lonely room,
Till all the timbers of the Mermaid Inn
Trembled above me with their ghostly song:

I

Say to the King, quoth Raleigh
I have a tale to tell him,
Wealth beyond derision,
Veils to lift from the sky,
Seas to sail for England
And a little dream to sell him,—
Gold, the gold of a vision,
That angels cannot buy.

II

Fair thro' the walls of his dungeon,
—What were the stones but a shadow?—
Streamed the light of the rapture,
The lure that he followed of old,
The dream of his old companions,
The vision of El Dorado,
The fleet that they never could capture,
The City of Sunset-gold.

III

Yet did they sail the seas
And, dazed with exceeding wonder,
Straight through the sunset-glory
Plunge into the dawn:
Leaving their home behind them,
By a road of splendour and thunder,
They came to their home in amazement
Simply by sailing on.

NEW POEMS

A WATCHWORD OF THE FLEET

[*For purposes of recognition at night a small squadron of Elizabethan ships, crossing the Atlantic, adopted as a watch-word the sentence: Before the world—was God.*]

They diced with Death. Their big sea-boots
  Were greased with blood. They swept the seas
For England; and—we reap the fruits
  Of their heroic deviltries!
Our creed is in the cold machine,
  The inhuman devildoms of brain,
  The bolt that splits the midnight main,
Loosed at a lever's touch; the lean
  Torpedo; "Twenty Miles of Power";
The steel-clad Dreadnoughts' dark array!
  Yet . . . we that keep the conning tower
Are not so strong as they
  Whose watchword we disdain.

They laughed at odds for England's sake!
  We count, yet cast our strength away.
One Admiral with the soul of Drake
  Would break the fleets of hell to-day!
Give us the splendid heavens of youth,
  Give us the banners of deathless flame,
  The ringing watchwords of their fame,
The faith, the hope, the simple truth!
  Then shall the Deep indeed be swayed
Through all its boundless breadth and length,
  Nor this proud England lean dismayed
On twenty miles of strength,
  Or shrink from aught but shame.

Pull out by night, O leave the shore
  And lighted streets of Plymouth town,
Pull out into the Deep once more!
  There, in the night of their renown,

The same great waters roll their gloom
  Around our midget period;
  And the huge decks that Raleigh trod
Over our petty darkness loom!
  Along the line the cry is passed
From all their heaven-illumined spars,
  Clear as a bell, from mast to mast,
It rings against the stars:
  Before the world—was God.

NEW WARS FOR OLD

"Peace with its luxury is the corrupter of Nations."
Any militarist Journal.

I

Peace! When have we prayed for peace?
Over us burns a star
Bright, beautiful, red for strife!
Yours are only the drum and the fife
And the golden braid and the surface of life!
Ours is the white-hot war!

II

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?
Ours are the weapons of men!
Time changes the face of the world!
Therefore your ancient flags are furled,
And ours are the unseen legions hurled
Up to the heights again!

III

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?
Is there no wrong to right?
Wrong crying to God on high
Here where the weak and the helpless die,
And the homeless hordes of the city go by,
The ranks are rallied to-night!

IV

Peace? When have we prayed for peace?
Are ye so dazed with words?
Earth, heaven, shall pass away
Ere for your passionless peace we pray!
Are ye deaf to the trumpets that call us to-day,
Blind to the blazing swords?

THE PRAYER FOR PEACE

"Unless public opinion can rise to the height of discussing the substitution of law for force as a great world-movement, the American arbitration proposals cannot be carried out."

Sir Edward Grey.

I

Dare we—though our hope deferred
Left us faithless long ago—
Dare we let our hearts be stirred,
Lift them to the light and *know*,
Cast away our cynic shields,
Break the sword that Mockery wields,
Know that Truth indeed prevails,
And that Justice holds the scales?
Britain, kneel!
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

II

Dare we know that this great hour,
Dawning on thy long renown,
Marks the purpose of thy power,
Crowns thee with a mightier crown,
Know that to this purpose climb
All the blood-red wars of Time?
If indeed thou *hast* a goal
Beaconing to thy warrior soul,
Britain, kneel!
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

III

Dare we know what every age
Writes with an unerring hand,
Read the midnight's moving page,
Read the stars and understand,—
Out of Chaos ye shall draw
Linked harmonies of Law,
Till around the Eternal Sun
All your peoples move in one?
Britain, kneel!
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

IV

Dare we know that wearied eyes
Dimmed with dust of every day
Can, once more, desire the skies
And the glorious upward way?
Dare we, if the Truth should still
Vex with doubt our alien will,
Take it to our Maker's throne,
Let Him speak with us alone?
Britain, kneel!
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

V

Dare we cast our pride away?
Dare we tread where Lincoln trod?
All the Future, by this day,
Waits to judge us and our God!
Set the struggling peoples free!
Crown with Law their Liberty!
Proud with an immortal pride,
Kneel we at our Sister's side!
Britain, kneel!
Kneel, Imperial Commonweal!

THE SWORD OF ENGLAND

(Written during a European war crisis)

Not as one muttering in a spell-bound sleep
  Shall England speak the word;
Not idly bid the embattled lightnings leap,
  Nor lightly draw the sword!

Let statesmen grope by night in a blind dream,
  The cold clear morning star
Should like a trophy in her helmet gleam
  When England sweeps to war!

Not like a derelict, drunk with surf and spray,
  And drifting down to doom;
But like the Sun-god calling up the day
  Should England rend that gloom.

Not as in trance, at some hypnotic call,
  Nor with a doubtful cry;
But a clear faith, like a banner above us all,
  Rolling from sky to sky.

She sheds no blood to that vain god of strife
  Whom striplings call "renown";
She knows that only they who reverence life
  Can nobly lay it down;

And these will ride from child and home and love,
  Through death and hell that day;
But O, her faith, her flag, must burn above,
  Her soul must lead the way!

THE DAWN OF PEACE

Yes—"on our brows we feel the breath
  Of dawn," though in the night we wait!
An arrow is in the heart of Death,
  A God is at the doors of Fate!

The spirit that moved upon the Deep
Is moving through the minds of men:
The nations feel it in their sleep,
A change has touched their dreams again.

Voices, confused, and faint, arise,
Troubling their hearts from East and West.
A doubtful light is in their skies,
A gleam that will not let them rest:
The dawn, the dawn is on the wing,
The stir of change on every side,
Unsignalled as the approach of Spring,
Invincible as the hawthorn-tide.

Have ye not heard it, far and nigh,
The voice of France across the dark,
And all the Atlantic with one cry
Beating the shores of Europe?—hark!
Then—if ye will—uplift your word
Of cynic wisdom! Once again
Tell us He came to bring a sword,
Tell us He lived and died in vain.

Say that we dream! Our dreams have woven
Truths that out-face the burning sun:
The lightnings, that we dreamed, have cloven
Time, space, and linked all lands in one!
Dreams! But their swift celestial fingers
Have knit the world with threads of steel,
Till no remotest island lingers
Beyond the world's one Commonweal.

Tell us that custom, sloth, and fear
Are strong, then name them "common-sense"!
Tell us that greed rules everywhere,
Then dub the lie "experience":
Year after year, age after age,
Has handed down, thro' fool and child,
For earth's divinest heritage
The dreams whereon old wisdom smiled.

Dreams are they? But ye cannot stay them,
Or thrust the dawn back for one hour!
Truth, Love, and Justice, if ye slay them,
Return with more than earthly power:
Strive, if ye will, to seal the fountains
That send the Spring thro' leaf and spray:
Drive back the sun from the Eastern mountains,
Then—bid this mightier movement stay.

It is the Dawn of Peace! The nations
From East to West have heard a cry,—
"Though all earth's blood-red generations
By hate and slaughter climbed thus high,
Here—on this height—still to aspire,
One only path remains untrod,
One path of love and peace climbs higher!
Make straight that highway for our God."

THE BRINGERS OF GOOD NEWS

Like fallen stars the watch-fires gleamed
Along our menaced age that night!
Our bivouacked century tossed and dreamed
Of battle with the approaching light.

Rumors of change, a sea-like roar,
Shook the firm earth with doubt and dread:
The clouds, in rushing legions bore
Their tattered eagles overhead.

I saw the muffled sentries rest
On the dark hills of Time. I saw
Around them march from East to West
The stars of the unresting law.

I knew that in their mighty course
They brought the dawn, they brought the day;
And that the unconquerable force
Of the new years was on the way.

I heard the feet of that great throng!
I saw them shine, like hope, afar!
Their shout, their shout was like a song,
And O, 'twas not a song of war!

Yet, as the whole world with their tramp
Quivered, a signal-lightning spoke,
A bugle warned our darkling camp,
And, like a thunder-cloud, it woke.

Our searchlights raked the world's wide ends.
O'er the dark hills a grey light crept.
Down, through the light, that host of friends
We took for foemen, triumphing swept.

The old century could not hear their cry,
How should it hear the song they sang?
We bring good news! It pierced the sky!
We bring good news! The welkin rang.

One shout of triumph and of faith;
And then—our shattering cannon roared!
But, over the reeking ranks of death,
The song rose like a single sword.

We bring good news! Red flared the guns!
We bring good news! The sabres flashed!
And the dark age with its own sons
In blind and furious battle clashed.

A swift, a terrible bugle pealed.
The sulphurous clouds were rolled away.
Embraced, embraced, on that red field,
The wounded and the dying lay.

We bring good news! Blood choked the word,
—We knew you not; so dark the night!—
O father, was I worth your sword?
O son, O herald of the light!

We bring good news!—The darkness fills
Mine eyes!—Nay, the night ebbs away!
And, over the everlasting hills,
The great new dawn led on the day.

THE LONELY SHRINE

(*A few months after the Milton Ter-centenary.*)

I

The crowd has passed away,
Faded the feast, and most forget!
Master, we come with lowly hearts to pay
Our deeper debt.

II

High they upheld the wine,
And royally, royally drank to thee!
Loud were their plaudits. Now the lonely shrine
Accepts our knee.

III

All dark and silent now!
Master, thy few are faithful still,
And nightly hear thy brooks that warbling flow
By Siloa's hill.

AT NOON

(AFTER THE FRENCH OF VERLAINE)

The sky is blue above the roof,
So calm, so blue;
One rustling bough above the roof
Rocks, the noon through.

The bell-tower in the sky, aloof,
Tenderly rings!
A bird upon the bough, aloof,
Sorrows and sings.

My God, my God, and life is here
So simple and still!
Far off, the murmuring town I hear
At the wind's will . . . .

What hast thou done, thou, weeping there?
O quick, the truth!
What hast thou done, thou, weeping there,
With thy lost youth?

TO A FRIEND OF BOYHOOD LOST AT SEA

O warm blue sky and dazzling sea,
Where have you hid my friend from me?
The white-chalk coast, the leagues of surf
Laugh to the May-light, now as then,
And violets in the short sweet turf
Make fragmentary heavens again,
And sea-born wings of rustling snow
Pass and re-pass as long ago.

Old friend, do you remember yet
The days when secretly we met
In that old harbor years a-back,
Where I admired your billowing walk,
Or in that perilous fishing smack
What tarry oaths perfumed your talk,
The sails we set, the ropes we spliced,
The raw potato that we sliced,

For mackerel-bait—and how it shines
Far down, at end of the taut lines!—
And the great catch we made that day,

Loading our boat with rainbows, quick
And quivering, while you smoked your clay:
And I took home your "Deadwood Dick"
In yellow and red, when day was done
And you took home my Stevenson?

Not leagues, as when you sailed the deep,
But only some frail bars of sleep
Sever us now! Methinks you still
Recall, as I, in dreams, the quay,
The little port below the hill:
And all the changes of the sea,
Like some great music, can but roll
Our lives still nearer to the goal.

OUR LADY OF THE TWILIGHT

Our Lady of the Twilight
From out the sunset-lands
Comes gently stealing o'er the world
And stretches out her hands,
Over the blotched and broken wall,
The blind and fœtid lane,
She stretches out her hands and all
Is beautiful again.

No factory chimneys can defile
The beauty of her dress:
She stoops down with her heavenly smile
To heal and love and bless:
All tortured things, all evil powers,
All shapes of dark distress
Are turned to fragrance and to flowers
Beneath her kind caress.

Our Lady of the Twilight,
She melts our prison-bars!
She makes the sea forget the shore,
She fills the sky with stars.

And stooping over wharf and mill,
Chimney and shed and dome,
Turns them to fairy palaces,
Then calls her children home.

She stoops to bless the stunted tree,
And from the furrowed plain,
And from the wrinkled brow she smooths
The lines of care and pain:
Hers are the gentle hands and eyes
And hers the peaceful breath
That ope, in sunset-softened skies,
The quiet gates of death.

Our Lady of the Twilight,
She hath such gentle hands,
So lovely are the gifts she brings
From out the sunset-lands,
So bountiful, so merciful
So sweet of soul is she;
And over all the world she draws
Her cloak of charity.

THE HILL-FLOWERS

"I will lift up mine eyes to the hills"

I

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,
Ere I waken in the city—Life, thy dawn makes all things new!
And up a fir-clad glen, far from all the haunts of men,
Up a glen among the mountains, oh my feet are wings again!

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,
O mountains of my boyhood, I come again to you,
By the little path I know, with the sea far below,
And above, the great cloud-galleons with their sails of rose and snow;

As of old, when all was young, and the earth a song unsung
And the heather through the crimson dawn its Eden incense flung

From the mountain-heights of joy, for a careless-hearted boy,
And the lavrocks rose like fountain sprays of bliss that ne'er could cloy,

From their little beds of bloom, from the golden gorse and broom,
With a song to God the Giver, o'er that waste of wild perfume;
Blowing from height to height, in a glory of great light,
While the cottage-clustered valleys held the lilac last of night,

So, when dawn is in the skies, in a dream, a dream, I rise,
And I follow my lost boyhood to the heights of Paradise.
Life, thy dawn makes all things new! Hills of Youth, I come to you,
Moving through the dew, moving through the dew.

II

Moving through the dew, moving through the dew,
Floats a brother's face to meet me! Is it you? Is it you?
For the night I leave behind keeps these dazzled eyes still blind!
But oh, the little hill-flowers, their scent is wise and kind;

And I shall not lose the way from the darkness to the day,
While dust can cling as their scent clings to memory for aye;
And the least link in the chain can recall the whole again,
And heaven at last resume its far-flung harvests, grain by grain.

To the hill-flowers clings my dust, and tho' eyeless Death may thrust
All else into the darkness, in their heaven I put my trust;
And a dawn shall bid me climb to the little spread of thyme
Where first I heard the ripple of the fountain-heads of rhyme.

And a fir-wood that I know, from dawn to sunset-glow,
Shall whisper to a lonely sea, that swings far, far below.
Death, thy dawn makes all things new. Hills of Youth, I come to you,
Moving through the dew, moving through the dew.

THE CAROL OF THE FIR-TREE

Quoth the Fir-tree, "Orange and vine"
Sing 'Nowell, Nowell, Nowell'!
"Have their honour: I have mine!"
In Excelsis Gloria!
"I am kin to the great king's house,"
Ring 'Nowell, Nowell, Nowell'!
"And Lebanon whispers in my boughs."
In Excelsis Gloria!

Apple and cherry, pear and plum,
Winds of Autumn, sigh 'Nowell'!
All the trees like mages come
Bending low with 'Gloria'!
Holding out on every hand
Summer pilgrims to Nowell!
Gorgeous gifts from Elfin-land.
And the May saith 'Gloria'!

Out of the darkness—who shall say
Gold and myrrh for this Nowell!
How they win their wizard way?
Out of the East with 'Gloria'!
Men that eat of the sun and dew
Angels laugh and sing, 'Nowell.'
Call it "fruit," and say it "grew"!
Into the West with 'Gloria'!

"Leaves that fall," whispered the Fir
Through the forest sing 'Nowell'!
"I am winter's minister."
In Excelsis Gloria!
Summer friends may come and go,
Up the mountain sing 'Nowell.'
Love abides thro' storm and snow.
Down the valley, 'Gloria'!

"On my boughs, on mine on mine,"
Father and mother, sing 'Nowell'!
"All the fruits of the earth shall twine."
Bending low with 'Gloria.'

"Sword of wood and doll of wax"
Little children, sing 'Nowell.'
"Swing on the stem was cleft with the axe!"
Craftsmen all, a 'Gloria.'

"Hear! I have looked on the other side."
Out of the East, O sing 'Nowell'!
"Because to live this night I died!"
Into the West with 'Gloria.'
"Hear! In this lighted room I have found"
Ye that seek, O sing 'Nowell'!
"The spell that worketh underground."
Ye that doubt, a 'Gloria.'

"I have found it, even I,"
Ye that are lowly, sing 'Nowell'!
"The secret of this alchemy!"
Ye that are poor, a 'Gloria.'
"Look, your tinsel turneth to gold."
Sing 'Nowell! Nowell! Nowell!'
"Your dust to a hand for love to hold!"
In Excelsis Gloria.

"Lay the axe at my young stem now!"
Woodman, woodman, sing 'Nowell.'
"Set a star on every bough!"
In Excelsis Gloria!
"Hall and cot shall see me stand,"
Rich and poor man, sing 'Nowell'!
"Giver of gifts from Elfin-land."
Oberon, answer 'Gloria.'

"Hung by the hilt on your Christmas-tree"
Little children, sing 'Nowell'!
"Your wooden sword is a cross for me."
Emperors, a 'Gloria.'
"I have found that fabulous stone"
Ocean-worthies, cry 'Nowell.'
"Which turneth all things into one,"
Wise men all, a 'Gloria.'

"It is not ruby nor anything"
Jeweller, jeweller, sing 'Nowell'!
"Fit for the crown of an earthly King:"
In Excelsis Gloria!
"It is not here! It is not there!"
Traveller, rest and cry 'Nowell'!
"It is one thing and everywhere!"
Heaven and Earth sing 'Gloria.'

"It is the earth, the moon, the sun,"
Mote in the sunbeam, sing 'Nowell'!
"And all the stars that march as one."
In Excelsis Gloria!
"Here, by the touch of it, I can see"
Sing, O Life, a sweet Nowell!
"The world's King die on a Christmas-tree."
Answer, Death, with 'Gloria.'

"Here, not set in a realm apart,"
East and West are one 'Nowell'!
"Holy Land is in your Heart!"
North and South one 'Gloria'!
"Death is a birth, birth is a death,"
Love is all, O sing 'Nowell'!
"And London one with Nazareth."
And all the World a 'Gloria.'

"And angels over your heart's roof sing"
Birds of God, O pour 'Nowell'!
"That a poor man's son is the Son of a King!"
Out of your heart this 'Gloria'!
"Round the world you'll not away"
In your own soul, they sing 'Nowell'!
"From Holy Land this Christmas Day!"
In your own soul, this 'Gloria.'

LAVENDER

Lavender, lavender
That makes your linen sweet;
The hawker brings his basket
Down the sooty street:
The dirty doors and pavements
Are simmering in the heat:
He brings a dream to London,
And drags his weary feet.

Lavender, lavender,
From where the bee hums,
To the loud roar of London,
With purple dreams he comes,
From raggèd lanes of wild-flowers
To raggèd London slums,
With a basket full of lavender
And purple dreams he comes.

Is it nought to you that hear him?
With the old strange cry
The weary hawker passes,
And some will come and buy,
And some will let him pass away
And only heave a sigh,
But most will neither heed nor hear
When dreams go by.

Lavender, lavender!
His songs were fair and sweet,
He brought us harvests out of heaven,
Full sheaves of radiant wheat;
He brought us keys to Paradise,
And hawked them thro' the street;
He brought his dreams to London,
And dragged his weary feet.

Lavender, lavender!
He is gone. The sunset glows;
But through the brain of London
The mystic fragrance flows.
Each foggy cell remembers,
Each raggèd alley knows,
The land he left behind him,
The land to which he goes.

THE END

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